

The Medical Residency Statement, Dissected.

Residency statements (called personal statements, letters of intent, and essays) are usually about one page long, and do three things. First, they give you a chance to introduce yourself to a Residency Director and discuss the person behind the activities and achievements listed on your CV. You do this by illuminating why these experiences are personally meaningful, and how they have developed your definition of the qualities you strive for as a physician. Second, they are an opportunity to state your case about why you feel your skills, experiences and perspective will directly contribute to their program. Third, they explain your reasons for seeking residency, and how they relate to your long-term goals.

In fact, a strong statement is rather like a “pre-interview”, responding to questions often asked in interviews, such as: Tell me a little about yourself. What are you looking for in a residency program? What do you feel you would bring to our program? What are you most proud of? Tell me about your most challenging experience and how you overcame it.

Below we have dissected a strong statement. It is strong because it is:

1. Personal (using detailed examples from the writer’s experience)
2. Well-organized (with clear themes explored in a logical fashion)
3. Centered around the three points mentioned above (definition of the qualities of an excellent physician, strength of the candidate, reasons for choosing this particular residency)
4. Free of grammatical or spelling errors

These qualities also make it unique. In the end, it should be clear by the examples, the focus, and the ‘voice’, that only this candidate could have written this essay, which speaks to the candidate’s sincerity. This is what helps a Residency Director distinguish you from other candidates, and see you as an individual as well as a competent and motivated applicant.

The Opening Paragraph: Fred summarizes his themes

Fred Garcia

The successes I have had in life have come because I eagerly sought out challenges that helped me learn and grow, as well as cultivated meaningful relationships. One such relationship was with Dr. Olivia Langdon, my college Rugby coach at the University of Missouri. Our team had learned how to play to its strengths, and in the final regular season game of my senior year, she chose me to take a penalty kick against the University of Washington. It was the opportunity we had waited for to make our team one of the few in the country to ever complete an undefeated regular season. Our #1 national ranking was on the line; I had waited for such a moment my entire life. I took a deep breath, and then I scored the game-winning goal, one of the biggest in the program’s history. **I will never forget that feeling, not only for my own abilities, but what our team was able to accomplish through our collective efforts.**

Medical school is another engaging challenge, where I have developed a love for the field of emergency medicine. To see be able to treat a diverse range of patients who come in with a variety of acute issues excites me intellectually as well as fulfills me as a clinician. I want to be a leader in the field of emergency medicine, **and in doing so I plan to focus primarily on three areas: contributing to the profession through meaningful research, striving for excellence clinically, and giving back to underserved communities in abundance.**

WHY ARE THESE STRONG SUMMARY PARAGRAPHS?

A. **Content-wise:** The summary paragraphs (no more than 2!) tell the Residency Director the focus of the Fred’s essay by:

1. Using a story to illustrate the underlying theme of all of his activities: **Teamwork.**

2. Outlining, in order, the essay’s main themes: his commitment to:

- **Research**
- **Clinical excellence**
- **Service.**

B. **Format-wise:** Whatever themes you choose need to be organized consistently. You will see that his essay’s outline is:

1. Opening paragraph
2. **Research experience**
3. **Clinical experience**
4. **Service**
5. Closing paragraph

Main Theme 1: Fred's Research Experience Paragraph

The opportunity to be involved in significant scientific research at UCSF has taught me the skills to conduct a quality study, as well as how to distinguish between a well-designed study with solid results, and a poorly designed one. In my first two years at UCSF, I conducted a study involving ...*Fred states the name of the research study here.* I completed almost the entire project independently, from writing the grant proposal to presenting the study after completion. **That project led to my working on a study with two students from another medical school as well as helping an emergency medicine resident with his research.** I am currently working with Dr. X, and we are analyzing ...*Fred takes a line to discuss the research here. Fred takes another line to discuss why this research was specifically interesting to him.* It is in this environment **that I have learned how to write a quality grant proposal, draft and carry out a project protocol, analyze and interpret data, conduct an extensive literature review, and write up and present a study.** I would use these skills in a residency program to help investigate and improve outcomes for underserved patients.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

A. **Content-wise:** Fred makes it personal. In every paragraph he discusses outcomes (what skills and knowledge he has as a result of his experiences) and personal perspectives (what is meaningful to him and why).

For example, here Fred wants the Residency Director to know that his experiences have taught him how to:

1. Conduct a study
2. Write a proposal, carry out protocols, interpret data, and present results.

...and that these skills are part of what he will contribute to their residency program.

Teamwork: Note that Fred's example supports his theme of working in teams (working with 2 students).

Main Theme 2: Fred's Clinical Experience Paragraph

I am interested in clinically applying the knowledge generated from quality research. I feel that clinical trials are the best way to understand the limitations and potential of different treatment options. For instance, while on rotations in the Emergency Department at Highland Hospital I encountered many patients with *Fred lists a condition here* and realized that treatment options could be even further improved. Consequently I sought out the mentorship of Dr. X, who had been working on investigating *Fred lists issue here* and was able **to collaborate with Dr. X and residents at Highland and UCSF** in the design of clinical studies evaluating *Fred states the nature of the collaborative research here.* Our clinical research resulted in an experimental diagnostic approach that we are piloting with other emergency medicine physicians at various safety net hospitals, including Highland Hospital and Zuckerberg General Hospital. Thus far, our research has resulted in improved referral results for a subset of patients who previously felt they didn't have any other options. **I find it exciting to apply what I have learned; being able to provide more treatment options for underserved patients in various communities through clinical research has been one of the most gratifying experiences I have had in medicine.**

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

A. **Format-wise:** Note each paragraph begins with an opening sentence that states the focus of the paragraph; in this case, his clinical experience.

B. **Content-wise:** Fred doesn't repeat every clinical experience in his CV. He features two (his EM rotation and clinical research), to give the Residency Director a sense of his range.

C. **Content-wise:** Fred makes it personal: he ends with a summary statement that explains what he personally finds clinically rewarding.

Teamwork: note another example of working in teams (assisting residents).

Main Theme 3: Fred's Service Paragraph

Other meaningful experiences I've engaged in throughout my life involve service and collaboration. In my family, there has always been a philosophy of service, and each year we spend time together and participate in service projects. Over the years I have helped provide food, beds, and shelter to vulnerable and underserved populations in the United States. For example I spent two years working **with a team of volunteers** in underserved areas in Baltimore, Maryland, helping Latino immigrants improve their lives and teaching free English classes. **One amazing aspect of these experiences has been to see how organizations mobilize and motivate individuals to help others. I applied those lessons when I was chosen as the Homeless Clinic Outreach Coordinator for my class.** We organized and directed two benefits, which raised thousands of dollars that were matched by large corporations and donated to food safety programs and health promotion projects. Lastly, **as President of the Latino Medical Student Association** during my second year of medical school I led various public health projects in the San Francisco area. Like physicians in the emergency department, I highly value teamwork and have a strong sense of service to vulnerable communities.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

A. **Format-wise:** Fred again opens with the focus of the paragraph: service.

B. **Content wise:** Fred makes it personal: he explains what he has learned, and how he has applied what he has learned. (Helping the Residency Director learn more about the skills and perspective he brings to a residency program)

Teamwork: Fred gives four more different examples of team-focused experiences, in his service experiences (family, volunteers, outreach coordinator, association president).

The Closing Paragraph: Fred ties it all together

In an emergency medicine residency program, I want to learn more about techniques, approaches and best practices, so I can use what I learn to benefit others as a caring community centered physician. I intend to serve my local community in various settings by continuing to be involved in volunteer work. Practicing in an area near a medical school is another goal of mine, so that I can continue finding teaching opportunities, as well as research and leadership experiences. I intend to have a lasting impact by working hard, being a team player, and continuing to focus on research, clinical excellence and service throughout my career. **I seek a program with many of the same qualities of my rugby team, and my best research, clinical and service experiences. All were highly functioning teams in four ways. First, there was a commitment by all of the team members to a common goal; second, clarity of and respect for what each person brought to the group; third, all were hardworking, and; lastly, each was supportive of the individual development of other team members. I would welcome the opportunity to be a part of such a team again.**

WHY IS THIS A GOOD CLOSING PARAGRAPH?

A. **Format-wise:** Fred begins by articulating his goals for residency: techniques, approaches, and best practices...and discusses long-term goals.

B. **Content-wise:** Fred returns a final time to his theme of teamwork to give specifics about the qualities he seeks in a residency program.

(Note he doesn't use buzz words that Program Directors hear all the time, and any candidate could say: 'I want to be a part of your top ranked, nationally recognized program, with excellent clinicians and resources').

Fred makes it personal by focusing on what meaningful to him (by sharing his individual definition teamwork), pulling on themes that are clearly identified in his essay.

Please see the next page for the complete one-page essay.

Fred Garcia

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