

# The Dentistry 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 and philosophy of the qualities you strive for as a dentist. 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 dentist, 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: Mark summarizes his themes

Mark Twain

The successes I have had in life have come because others gave me opportunities and I took full advantage of them. One such person was Dr. Olivia Langdon, my college Rugby coach at the University of Missouri. Our team had learned how 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.**

Dental school is another great opportunity that has come to me, and as I have studied hard and treated patients in the clinic, I have developed a love for the field of endodontics. To see people come in with so much pain and to observe the change on their faces after I treated them with endodontic therapy is another unforgettable feeling. I want to be a leader in the field of endodontics, **and in doing so I plan to focus primarily on three areas: contributing to the profession through meaningful research, striving for perfection clinically, and giving back to the community 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 Mark’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: Mark'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 ...*Mark 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 dental school as well as helping an endodontic resident with his Masters thesis.** I am currently working with Dr. Samuel Clemens, and we are analyzing ....*Mark takes a line to discuss the research here. Mark 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.**

### WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

A. **Content-wise:** Mark 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 Mark 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 Mark's example supports his theme of working in teams (working with 2 students).

## Main Theme 2: Mark's Clinical Experience Paragraph

**I am interested in clinically applying the knowledge generated from quality research.** This has meant a consistent commitment to my studies. I have intentionally applied myself to keep my scores among the top of my class, and scored well on the National Boards. The work has helped me improve quickly in the clinic, and **I have assisted residents,** often peeking into the microscopes and learning about different clinical manifestations of pulpal and periapical pathologies. I also observed endodontists in private practice, including my sister, and learned about various rotary systems, cleaning and shaping techniques, and the latest technology in digital radiography. **I find it exciting to apply what I have learned as I treat my own patients; being able to relieve intense, persistent pain through quality access of the pulp, debridement, disinfection, and achieving dense, three-dimensional obturation from apex to orifice has been one of the most gratifying experiences I have had in dentistry.**

### 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:** Mark doesn't repeat every clinical experience in his CV. He features two (assisting residents and observing endodontists), to give the Residency Director a sense of his range.

C. **Content-wise:** Mark 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: Mark's Service Paragraph**

Another wonderful experience I have had throughout my life involves service. 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. I also spent two years working in 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 UCSF Community Service Coordinator for my class. We organized and directed two benefits, which raised thousands of dollars that were matched by large corporations and donated to famine relief programs and health promotion projects. Lastly, I was elected Class President my third year and led various public health projects in the San Francisco area.

**WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?**

- A. Format-wise: Mark again opens with the focus of the paragraph: service.
- B. Content wise: Mark 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: Mark gives for more different examples of team-focused experiences, in his service experiences (family, volunteers, service coordinator, class president).

**The Closing Paragraph: Mark ties it all together**

In a residency program, I want to learn more about techniques, approaches and best practices, and in using what I learn to benefit others as an endodontist. I intend to serve my local community in a private practice setting and continuing to be involved in volunteer work. Practicing in an area near a dental school is another goal of mine, so that I can continue finding teaching opportunities, as well as research and leadership experiences. I vow to make the absolute most of it by working hard, being a team player, and continuing to focus on these important areas 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: Mark begins by articulating his goals for residency: techniques, approaches, and best practices...and discusses long-term goals.
- B. Content-wise: Mark 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').

Mark 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.

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