

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)

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 Paragraphs: Leslie summarizes their career change

Leslie Knope

I have never made a rash decision in my life. I remember the first time my mother let me pick a bouquet of flowers for our house – it took me 30 minutes of analysis to know I was getting the right bunch. Now, 20 years later, not much has changed when it comes to making major life decisions. I carefully weigh my options and critically analyze how they fit with my interests, strengths, and professional goals.

In college, I majored in engineering because I was excited about such a transformational field with limitless career opportunities. I interned with several companies before deciding to pursue a career in traditional engineering. In a relatively short time, it became clear to me that I did not want to work in a highly corporate environment. I was far more excited and fulfilled by the many community engagement and service opportunities provided by the [work place]. I was challenged by the engineering aspects of the job and it sparked my love of creative problem solving; however, I craved more personal interactions. This experience taught me that I needed to find a career which engaged me intellectually and allowed me to work with people in a more profound and personal way.

WHY ARE THESE STRONG SUMMARY PARAGRAPHS?

- A. **Content-wise:** Leslie uses a personal anecdote to discuss the transition from engineering to dentistry. The applicant introduces their strong analytical skills, sound decision making and engineering skills.
- B. **Format-wise:** These two paragraphs serve to help the residency director understand why the applicant changed fields.

Main Theme: Intersection of Engineering and Dentistry

Knowing that I wasn't professionally satisfied, I explored careers I thought would foster both my scientific drive and need for personal interactions. I shadowed at a dental office and immediately felt a sense of belonging. I knew I had found something I would truly enjoy. Fast forward three years and I am thrilled with my decision to become a dentist. I have developed wonderful relationships with my patients and have never felt more rewarded. True to my nature, in addition to striving for excellence, I have spent time meticulously investigating different career paths within dentistry. I shadowed in specialty clinics and carefully ruled out each specialty before starting my orthodontics rotation. In the post-graduate orthodontics clinic my engineering side came alive again! **I was surprised by how much engineering there was in treating a smile to ideal.** You can perfectly place a bracket, apply appropriate root torque, and create a smile your patient will be excited to sport. **I realized that orthodontia is a field which brings together my appreciation of engineering and love of patient centered care.**

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- A. Content-wise: Leslie shows a good understanding of how their engineering skills will fit into orthodontics.

Main Theme: Research and Analytical Skills

While at UCSF, I have worked hard to become the best dentist and orthodontic candidate possible. I have focused on clinical and academic excellence, research, and leadership. **Knowing that my scope of experience in the dental field was limited, I sought to expand my knowledge base by pursuing a [research fellowship].** During my fellowship I saw dentistry practiced in [location] and learned first-hand how much benefit even one dentist can provide to a community without adequate care. **Within my project I was also able to practice statistical analysis, sharpen my analytical skills, and present at national conferences.** In my determination to expand my knowledge of the dental field, I discovered a great appreciation for clinical research and furthered my intellectual curiosity.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- A. Content-wise: Leslie shows that their drive to learn is very strong and has made a concerted effort to further develop their research and other analytical skills.

They don't go into too much detail about the project (that information is in the CV), but hit the main highlights.

Main Theme: Leadership and Interpersonal Skills

In parallel, I've continued strengthening my leadership and interpersonal skills. I was elected president of [organization name] student chapter as a 2nd year student. My [organization name] board members and I revitalized the organization and turned it into the National Chapter of the Year (20__). The reorganization of the [organization name] student chapter gave us the opportunity to orchestrate our own professional skills. In addition to club and committee leadership, I strive to give back to the UCSF community through teaching and volunteering. I teach first year dental students anatomy, tutor biochemistry, and volunteer at various outreach events. My favorite form of volunteerism is promoting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) to young girls. I am in an ideal position to teach and inspire this population to pursue careers they may never have considered. These extracurricular activities, particularly those centered on working with youth, have further fueled my desire to become an orthodontist. I am excited to have the opportunity to spend my career treating and teaching pre-teens and teenagers. So many positive habits and influences will be formed during this time, and I believe I can be a wonderful role model for them.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- B. Format-wise: Leslie opens the focus of the paragraph to discuss their leadership and interpersonal skills.
- C. Content-wise: Leslie uses a few personal examples of their most successful leadership roles and chooses to highlight their time working with the patient population most applicable to orthodontics.

Leslie doesn't include all of their leadership or services, but focuses on those that they are most passionate about and make them unique.

The Closing Paragraph: Leslie ties it all together

I realize my journey to dental school and pursuit of orthodontics were somewhat atypical; however, I firmly believe I have developed the qualities and skills necessary to be a highly successful orthodontic resident. I am a curious, lifelong learner with a strong analytical side and love for patient care. I have spent the requisite time determining that orthodontics is a field in which I will be happy, impactful and highly successful. My passion for the field has grown along with my knowledge and clinical skills. I am confident that the fast-paced, youthful environment will provide me continual satisfaction and joy throughout my career. I am eager to continue my education by specializing in the field of orthodontics. I look forward to the challenge and excitement presented by your program.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- A. Format-wise: Leslie ties it all together by revisiting their sound decision-making, engineering experience, and analytical skills.
- B. Content wise: The applicant concisely lays out their qualifications to the residency director and uses the final sentences to reemphasize their desire to enter the field.

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

Leslie Knope

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