

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 a clear theme explored in a straight-forward fashion)
3. Largely 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 Paragraph

Sandy Flanagan

26.2—I find it ironic that such a rational number can invoke such irrational fears. For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to run a marathon. When I began running in college, I could not even finish a mile. My lungs struggled to keep up with my body, and the breathlessness felt incredibly unpleasant. Too windy outside. Too cold. Too hot. There were numerous excuses to justify staying at home, but I was determined to meet my goal, and so I broke it down to steps and fractions. Each month, I pushed myself to run a little longer. During my D1 year, I reached my first milestone –13.1. Crossing the finish line was exhilarating, and that moment ignited my passion for running. I ran my second half marathon the following year and achieved a new personal record. Being able to complete these races proved that I could push myself further than I thought, and I began to feel that 26.2 would become a reality for me.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG SUMMARY PARAGRAPH?

Content-wise: Sandy introduces a personal anecdote and themes of determination and problem solving.

Main Theme: Determination

My journey to a full marathon paralleled my experience in dental school, particularly with the field of prosthodontics. When I was first introduced to prosthodontics as a 2nd year dental student, I really struggled. We learned to fabricate a complete denture, but from the start, wax dripped everywhere on my table. I spent more time than my classmates in lab only to be told that the teeth were not occluding correctly. The disappointment and frustration were crippling at times. **But as I had learned from running, I endeavored not be discouraged by setbacks, and to actively seek help.**

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- A. **Format-wise:** Sandy does an excellent job of transitioning from one paragraph to the next.
- B. **Content-wise:** Sandy utilizes this paragraph well to discuss their initial interest in prosthodontics and also elaborate on their determination.

Main Theme: Problem-Solving

The extra time spent with faculty gave me the opportunity to discover incredible aspects of prosthodontics. **I saw how they methodically dissected each patient case: first a problem list, then diagnosis, then phases of treatment, and finally a definitive restorative plan.** They saw beyond a patient's immediate concerns, broke down challenging and complex cases effortlessly into smaller and simpler fragments, and addressed the restorative needs comprehensively. It was as if they were solving interesting puzzles. When I shadowed the prosthodontics residents, I saw how they made treatment decisions with scientifically-based rationale and confidence. These role models and the way they practiced really captivated me. **I wanted to feel this confident, and be able to fluidly deconstruct a patient's case and build a treatment plan, with every step supported by logic, science, and care.**

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH?

- A. **Content-wise:** The applicant emphasizes their problem-solving skills and the value they place on being methodical.

Main Themes: Clinical experience and Attention to Detail

Additionally, I learned to appreciate the aesthetics in prosthodontics. I have always enjoyed making art with my hands, from designing and building architectural projects as an architecture major, to sketching and capturing different perspectives on camera as my hobby. Prosthodontics highlights this artistic process, through creating beautifully designed dental and maxillofacial prostheses. **This past spring, I worked with prosthodontist Dr. _____, to fabricate a set of dentures for my patient. With a quick glance, he saw that she needed more lip support and suggested widening the dental arch by moving the canines. The adjustments immediately provided a more natural facial profile.**

WHY ARE THESE STRONG PARAGRAPHS?

- A. **Format-wise:** Sandy does a nice job of linking their college major to the overall field of prosthodontics.
- B. **Content-wise:** Sandy uses a relevant clinical experience to give the residency director a sense of their abilities.

I approached the remaining steps with similar precision, focused on addressing the psychological and aesthetic concerns of my patient. I will never forget the smile on my patient's face when we delivered her denture. It will serve as a reminder of the importance of understanding lab work and attention to details in clinical care.

Just as having good body posture and awareness helps during long runs, having a clear understanding of its underlying mechanics will help me create dental prostheses that can endure daily use. I want to build strong fundamentals to craft prostheses that can restore lost oral structure, transform patient's smile, and improve their confidence. Throughout my journey in dental school, I have refined my manual dexterity and attention to details, and have cultivated a curious mind. Along with my artistic ability, these are the skills I look forward to honing during my residency.

Main Themes: Wrapping it Up

My clinical experience inspired my love for prosthodontics. Running gave me the mental framework to pursue this love. When you run, you cannot become complacent, and you have to keep pushing yourself to grow—especially when you hit a mental roadblock. My dental prosthodontics residency will challenge me to continue my pursuit for ongoing growth and lifelong learning. It will provide me with the necessary skills to practice as a prosthodontist, but more importantly, further foster my mentality to consistently strive for excellence in service. As I begin the next stage of my training, I am looking forward to learning more about designing durable dental prosthesis, collaborating between specialties, and practicing better patient management. It is my desire to pursue a residency in prosthodontics, and like my training for this marathon, I will do so with great perseverance and passion.

WHY ARE THESE STRONG PARAGRAPHS (CONT):

- D. Content-wise: Sandy highlights their attention to detail, as well as additional skills that will be specifically useful in prosthodontics.

WHY IS THIS A STRONG PARAGRAPH:

- A. Format-wise: Sandy does an excellent job of finalizing their statement through tying it back to running.
- B. Content-wise: The applicant specially addresses their reason for pursuing additional training.

Sandy uses this paragraph to provide additional support to the residency director as to why they are a good candidate for residency.

Sandy Flanagan

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