

Fraser's

PORTFOLIO GUIDE

HOW TO PERFECT YOUR PORTFOLIO AND PERSONAL STATEMENT



est. 2010

Fraser's

GAMSAT TUITION



www.frasersinterview.com.au

Table of Contents:

1. Before We Start...

2. Personal Statements: Introduction

- a. How to Begin
- b. Important Tips

3. The University of Notre Dame: Personal Statement

- a. How is the personal statement used?
- b. How is it marked?
- c. When should I start?

4. Portfolios: Introduction

5. The University of Notre Dame: Portfolio

- a. What to write in the subsections?
- b. Leadership Experiences
- c. Service to Community/Church Involvement
- d. Other Academic and Life Achievement

6. The University of Wollongong: Portfolio

- a. What to write in the subsections?
 - b. Leadership
 - c. Capacity to Work With Others
 - d. Service Ethic
 - e. Diversity Experience
 - f. High Level of Performance in an Area of Human Endeavour
6. Academic Experience

7. FAQs & Thanks



1. Before We Start...

Have you ever sat down to write your portfolio and personal statement and got frustrated not knowing what to put down or where to begin? Fraser's Portfolio Guide is designed to allay your anxiety and help structure the best possible portfolios and personal statements in your GEMSAS application to help you get that interview. This document has been developed by med students who were successful applicants with portfolio universities. We encourage you to read this before starting.

2. Personal Statements: Introduction

The personal statement is a chance to reflect upon your personal qualities, development, and innermost motivations and experiences for entering a career in medicine. Because of this, personal statements can arguably be the most challenging part of your application. How do you stand out from the group of thousands of applications? How do you make *that* university choose *your* application over the next candidate?

Having successfully received interviews and gone through the process of becoming medical students, we know the importance of making your story unique to the admissions body. Since it is they who will decide your acceptance, we want to ensure that you leave an impression on them. The journey into medicine is difficult and can be emotionally draining, so it is imperative that you have your reasons on why you are endeavouring to undertake the challenge.

2a. How to Begin

It may seem daunting and overwhelming, however, personal statements are often a useful source of reflection on why you chose this path and can really summarise your motivations. The one attribute that all successful applicants have in common is their passion to contribute to medicine. However, how does this passion and commitment to medicine arise? What makes you stand out from the rest of the crowd? Why do you want to do medicine and why should your preferred medical school choose you?

Consider the aims of your personal statement before writing. How do you demonstrate that you have the attributes to be an upstanding medical student, and eventually, a medical practitioner? Do you have the potential to develop and grow into a competent member of the medical profession, and if so, how? This requires not only personal attributes and experiences, but also an understanding of the reality yet to come. Furthermore, acknowledging a desire for continuous growth shows an enthusiasm for both the educational and professional career of medicine.

To get started, consider the following:

1. Compile the skills, experiences and achievements that you have gained throughout your life
2. Relate them to your aims, ensuring you give solid evidence and justifications for each statement (you will need to provide references that may be contacted for verification)
3. Demonstrate insights from your experiences and what you have learnt or gained
4. Tie in all these skills and qualities into what the specific school is looking for and how you can contribute as a prospective student and future doctor

Keep in mind that what the medical schools are looking for are your insights and reflections from what you experienced on your journey, even if it's from your day-to-day activities. Medical schools are *not* expecting you to have groundbreaking achievements (ie. being a previous astronomer, developing a cure for cancer etc.), but rather looking for students who have depth and can extrapolate meaning from what they experience. Beyond that, maturity and a well-thought-out decision as to why to study medicine are also important in showing your commitment to the challenges of the course and vocation ahead.

Note: If you don't know where to start, write a timeline or mind map of key events that happened in the past 5-10 years of your life. Pinpoint noteworthy activities and areas of growth as this will help spark ideas!

2b. Important Tips:

Avoid Clichés

The vast majority of applicants will state in their personal statements that their motivation to study medicine is 'a desire/passion/wanting to help people'. Please **DO NOT** be one of those people! Instead, demonstrate through key insights and reflections from your experiences that this career is right for you because of x, y, z...

Captivate Your Reader and Tell A Narrative

Make sure your opening line encompasses the main point and sets the theme for the whole statement.

Example: *"It may be an unexpected circumstance or a chance to help someone that sparks an inner calling."*

Draw from your unique encounters as an individual and relate them to a narrative.

Example: *"During a quiet afternoon at home, my father began choking on one of his prescription pills. Being ten years old at the time, I innocently performed the Heimlich maneuver learned after watching a first aid video at school. In later years, my father would laugh and brag to his friends about how I saved his life. As I matured into an adult, that moment often came to mind, which inspired me to learn basic life support and volunteer teaching the local church members. Thus began my journey in pursuing a career in medicine."*

Alternative: Get straight to the point! *"My passion for medicine began at a young age watching doctors in a nearby clinic serve our small rural town..."*

N.B. This is just an example of one way to tell a narrative - use it as inspiration rather than adhering strictly to its style.

Have a Structure

Make sure you organise your personal statement so that it is easy to read and follow. There is nothing wrong in using the standard 5-paragraph essay method (ie. introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion). Rather than having many ideas, select a few key ideas and spend the time developing and reflecting on them.

Transition Words/Phrases

Transition words and phrases are key to making sure the overall flow is smooth and not choppy. Use them between paragraphs and make sure each one is linked to the other. Keep the personal statement as one whole and integral piece.

Showing vs. Telling

Please do not state how you're compassionate and ethical. Unfortunately, a lot of applicants fall into this mistake. Instead, give solid examples to draw the spotlight onto who you truly are, and then explore how that makes you compassionate or ethical. Prove it by relating a story, sharing a reflection, or showing how these events affected you.



3. The University of Notre Dame: Personal Statement

Your personal statement has a maximum of 4,800 characters (approx. 800 words). Paragraphs and spacing are counted as characters. Any characters that exceed this limit will be automatically omitted.

As mentioned before, these personal statements are just that: personal. You need to show the admission panel that you are the best candidate out there. Write these personal statements to sell yourself. What makes them want *you* and not the next best version of you? Be your authentic self, but with motivation, ambition and passion.

Make sure you understand the [University Objects](#) and show how your personal attributes are aligned to them as best as possible

Notre Dame University Objects:

1. The provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values; and
2. The provision of an excellent standard of - teaching, scholarship and research; training for the professions; and pastoral care for its students.

3a. How is the personal statement used?

Invitation for an interview: These personal statements are scored and make up a percentage mark on whether you will be selected for an interview

Getting to know you: Universities aim to have a diverse cohort, therefore, it is important that you show to them that you are the best candidate

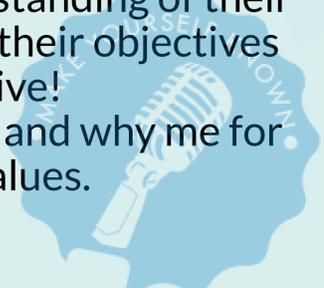
Myth: People think that the interviewers will not have read your personal statements before meeting you on interview day. In fact, they will have, and may even ask you questions for explanations about what you wrote!

3b. How is it marked?

1. Your motivation on why you would want to pursue a career in medicine and furthermore, that
2. particular university
3. Your understanding and respect of the University Objects
4. Your understanding of the reality and challenges that may present in the medical profession
5. Your experiences that support your reasons for endeavouring medicine
6. Capability to stay within the word limit (any characters that exceed this limit will be automatically omitted)

(Notre Dame does give recognition to higher degrees of PhD or Masters by research completed during a certain time period). Your ability to demonstrate the experience is strongly marked. This is more critical than making it about medicine and what you took from it.

Note: Since the University of Notre Dame requires you to mention your understanding of their University Objects, therefore either devote an entire paragraph to it or weave their objectives throughout the essay and explain how it aligns with your motivation. Get creative! Furthermore, it is important to provide a strong argument to 'why UND for me and why me for UND?'. You can do this by mentioning how you relate to their curriculum and values.



3c. When should I start?

There is no early time to start the application process. It can take some time to compose your personal applications, often with repeated redrafts. Writing is like polishing a stained mirror and will take several attempts before it glistens. Hence, make sure you schedule the time to review and rewrite over and over again until it is perfect. Since applications are due May 31st, the period between GAMSAT and the application due date is a good time to write these applications. However, in this instance, there is no such thing as starting an application too early. But no matter what, try not to let yourself only start once GAMSAT results come out; this puts you in a situation with considerable time pressure and this may come across in your writing. To begin, start by listing all the ideas and thoughts you want to mention in your personal statements, and start writing!

4. Portfolios: Introduction

Portfolios are designed to capture all significant activities, achievements and areas in your life up until this point. This provides proof for the admissions committee that you are competent and motivated for a career in medicine.

Preparing a perfect portfolio requires you to:

1. Describe in detail what the activity or achievement involved
2. Demonstrate what skills and qualities you've gained
3. Provide a reflection on how it affected you
4. Tie your experiences to **match** the qualities the universities are looking for and how it will make you a 5. proficient medical practitioner
5. Address why the experience is important to the section and how does it advance your role (ie. being a leader, doing service work etc.)

5. The University of Notre Dame: Portfolio

The University of Notre Dame has two medical schools in Australia. One in Perth, and the other in Sydney. They are considered to be two different medical schools, therefore, upon preferencing in GEMSAS, each would occupy an option. However, it is only required for you to write one portfolio and one personal statement for BOTH universities.

In addition to writing a personal statement, applicants must write about their

1. Leadership experiences
2. Service to the community or the Church
3. Other life and academic experiences

Each section has 480 characters (or approximately 80 words), to write about these additional sections. Like the personal statements, paragraphs and spacing are counted as characters, and if exceeded the limit, those characters will automatically be omitted. To verify these experiences, applicants will need to complete a list with the contact details of people who are able to verify these experiences. These referees will need to be happy to be contacted by the university (they really do check!) therefore they must be willing to provide their current telephone and email address. If the universities are unable to verify these experiences, they will disregard the experiences (which will not be beneficial for you). Therefore, **start** collecting these referees and get in contact with them!

5a. What to write in the subsections?

It's important to consider that the University of Notre Dame is a Catholic school that takes its intellectual tradition seriously. We would like to emphasise that you **do not** have to be Catholic nor do you even have to even mention that fact if you are. The university will not discriminate against your application based upon your religious beliefs, sexual orientation or political views. However, an ideal candidate would be service-oriented and embody universal virtues such as ethics, compassion and social justice. This is what they are looking for! Make sure you tailor your experiences to represent these qualities they want in their applicants.

To begin this process, writing dot points on the experiences and activities that you have done, and organised within these sections may prove to be helpful for you.

5b. Leadership Experiences

Being a good leader means having excellent communication skills, decision-making capabilities and being able to delegate and empower others. Think about experiences in your life where you were able to demonstrate these traits. This could be drawn from your role in university clubs or societies, research endeavours or professional work experience.

Bad Example:

I was captain of a hockey team in high school. As a hockey captain, my role included organising the field positions of each team member and shaking hands with the opponent before and after the game. Our team's training sessions were on Saturdays. As the captain, I would arrive early to prepare the equipment and set up the training routines for my team mates. I believe I was a great captain, because we won the finals that year.

Good Example:

As a committed leader of my Youth Group, I was fortunate to be chosen to train & mentor the future Junior Leaders, whilst guiding the current cohort. I developed and lead workshops on topics including; the value of informal education, critical thinking, pedagogy & leadership styles. Preparing others for leadership proved a valuable lesson for me, pushing me to grow into a better mentor & to better understand the significance of a shared & reciprocal education.

5c. Service to Community/Church Involvement

Almost every medical student has volunteer experiences. Mention the reasons why you chose to work with a particular organisation or be involved in helping a specific underserved group and how it aligns with your values. UND is a service-oriented medical school, looking for sincere, like-minded individuals. This section can include your community service, fundraising for charity or attending to the needs of the underserved locally and internationally.

Bad Example:

As a Christian, I regularly attend weekly Sunday masses at my local Catholic church. During mass, I enjoy listening to the sermons and singing hymns. I also participate in my Church's monthly fundraising events. Every month, the volunteers fundraise for a different cause. Last month, we had a bake sale in the local shopping centre to raise money for the homeless. My role usually involves baking cookies for the bake sale and walking about the shops with a collection tin.

Good Example:

As a head receptionist in a community GP clinic, I was fortunate to be welcomed into the rural community of Cowra. As a town with varying demographics & socioeconomic levels, I gained unique insights into the service and care that the doctors provided to the community. As a receptionist, it was a pleasure to liaise with & help patients. The warmth of both the doctors and our patients encouraged my ongoing effort to provide the best service I could.



5d. Other Academic or Life Achievements

This is an opportunity to demonstrate non-academic activities that shows a side of you that makes you stand out from the rest. Examples involve university or school awards, achievements in sport, travelling experiences or cross-cultural partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Bad Example:

In year 10, I received a credit for a National mathematics competition. Mathematics is usually not my strong point, but I wanted to improve from the previous year. So, to prepare for the competition, I practiced fifty challenging maths questions on a daily basis. When I didn't know how to solve the problem, I would ask my teacher for help.

Good Example:

During my undergraduate degree, I wrote and published a meta-analysis comparing alcohol harm-reduction interventions. The experience challenged me to critically analyse literature to collect appropriate studies for comparison. As I looked for strong studies to include in the analysis, the importance of the scientific method of knowledge generation, so essential to the progression of modern medicine, were emphasised.

6. The University of Wollongong: Portfolio

6a. What to write in the subsections?

The University of Wollongong has a strong emphasis on producing rural medical practitioners. Therefore, upon applications, they seek applicants who have areas of achievement, leadership, teamwork, service ethic and commitment to regional, rural and remote communities.

When submitting your application, you should be able to demonstrate experiences or activities in the following categories:

1. Leadership
2. Capacity to work with others
3. Service ethic- outside your employment environment
4. Diversity of experience
5. High level of performance in an area of human endeavour
6. Academic Experiences
7. Admissions Rural residency and Schooling (if applicable)

In each of these categories, you will have the opportunity to complete up to 5 activities within each category. It is recommended that you choose the most significant and relevant examples with the greatest depth of your involvement over the greatest length of time. Point form is acceptable and brief summaries (that gets your point across) are encouraged. There is a character limit of 300 characters for each activity description- use it wisely.

Note: Given the strict word limit, for these entries, focus *less* on reflection but rather the diversity of your achievements and what you actually did. Try to be succinct and straight to the point, but also demonstrate the qualities they are looking for.

Furthermore, ensure you have referees who are able to verify these experiences by phone and email. You are able to submit experiences and activities without verification, however, the scorers may choose to omit these parts of your application.



6b. Leadership

When considering leadership in your portfolio, UoW emphasises the importance of having displayed significant decision-making ability in a position, interest or area of work, or been recognised for this ability. They may have shown promotion or progression within an organisational structure or an increase or development in duties or responsibilities. Examples include tutoring, coaching, and having a leadership role in an organisation or university committee.

Bad Example:

I was a year 2 Mathematics and English tutor at a small tuition centre called "Study Smart". In addition to teaching, my role included preparing class materials, correcting homework and answering questions. I liked being a tutor and thought the students were really cute and funny.

Good Example:

As a head receptionist in the Ted Bundy clinic, my responsibility was to coordinate clinic staff & lead the smooth operation of the practice. I took it upon myself to implement new clinic administration practices, which both built a detailed understanding of medical systems as well as bolstering skills in organisation and team engagement.

6c. Capacity to work with others

You should select activities that demonstrate that you are not only able to work in a team environment, but go beyond and have the ability to be the team leader in a variety of contexts. Demonstrate this by relating your experiences working in a group, collaborating in research, or engaging with people from different backgrounds and cultures.

Bad Example:

In one of my group assignments, I was placed in a group with four other students. Our task was to create a presentation about the homeostasis. Unfortunately, I was not placed in a productive group and I ended up doing all the work by myself. I realised this was not fair for me, so I emailed the unit coordinator about my experience.

Good Example:

I worked in the team responsible for sterilizing & assembling all surgical tools & hospital instruments. Teamwork was essential to maintain best practice at all times & members in each work zone worked closely to check & ensure safety & hygiene protocols were strictly adhered to.

6d. Service Ethic (Outside your employment environment)

You should consider experiences where you are able to display services to the community, whether volunteering or not. UoW highlights their preference in experiences that go beyond the applicant's own personal interest, but instead, demonstrate participation mainly for the welfare or benefit of others. Incorporate your contributions to aid work, assisting the needy or volunteering at your local community centre.

Bad Example:

During the summer holiday, I volunteered with the Red Cross. I was able to travel to Malawi and volunteer in a rural village called Nano. My primary role was building a water tank with other Red Cross volunteers. However, the local school asked me to teach English. Thus, I spent the holidays constructing a water tank and teaching students.

Good Example:

At Make-A-Wish my efforts focus on delivering positive & enriching experiences for children with life-threatening illnesses. With my team, we fundraised to enable these wishes. It was both humbling & rewarding to provide joy & strength for the affected child & their loved ones.



6e. Diversity of Experience

UoW expresses their desire of individuals to have a broad range of experiences as they believe applicants will often communicate better and display a stronger grasp of empathy for others. Furthermore, by doing so, applicants are seen to be able to be more adaptive to new environments and conditions, which is needed in the unpredictable world of medicine. Diversity of experiences encompass your hobbies (arts, music and sport), travels or any other extracurricular activities.

Bad Example:

One of my friends introduced me to different types of extreme sports, such as rock climbing and skydiving. My favourite is rock climbing. Every month, my friends and I would travel to different parts of Australia and climb large cliffs. In preparation for these climbs, we would practice at the local indoor rock-climbing centre.

Good Example:

At 16 I lived in Spain for 6 months on exchange. It was very challenging as my first time living abroad & away from my parents. I relished in the opportunity to integrate and thrive in Spanish culture. In time, I made friends, learned a new language, & way of life.

6f. High Level of Performance in an Area of Human Endeavour

This area requests for experiences or activities that recognise the achievement by means of exertion, skill, practice and perseverance. Here, the criteria will be marked your ability to demonstrate the investment of skill, time and effort. These cover your military service, recognition of sports or arts, as well as awards for a particular skill.

Bad Example:

Last year, I won the junior singles men's badminton tournament. One of my hobbies is badminton and I trained every week with my friends. My training schedule involved doing rounds around the badminton court and two hours of badminton matches.

Good Example:

In recognition of my dedication to theatre & performing arts, in 2008 I was awarded Colours for Theatre whilst at High School. Colours recognises the highest level of achievement and excellence and was awarded to me for my capability, ongoing effort, & commitment to the field.

6g. Academic Experience

UoW is looking for academic achievements that are not seen upon calculating your GPA. Such examples comprise of you degrees (Bachelor's, honours, Master's, PhD), research work/publications, presentations at conferences, and scholarships.

Bad Example:

In year 9, my partner and I were placed first in the Japanese oral competition. Our oral presentation was about Japanese martial arts. In preparation for the competition, my partner and I wrote the script and prepared our costumes together. Afterwards, we asked our teacher to proof read the script and we practiced on a weekly basis after school.

Good Example:

During my Honours year at the Albert Fish institute, I was asked to present a poster at the Dahmer conference depicting my work on youth relationships with alcohol and their associated harms. It was inspiring to be influenced by academics who shared my passion for improving the lives of our community through public health strategies.



7. FAQs

Here is a list of common questions you might find helpful:

I don't have anything to write about for a portfolio, what do I do?

This feeling of having nothing to write about is common. If you are struggling for ideas consider writing a brief timeline of your past 5-10 years in chronological order. Thinking about your past this way will help you remember the activities you were involved in. Consider looking at your resume along with asking family and friends can also help yield some ideas to include in your portfolio. Keep in mind your professional experience can also be used to form some of your examples, even as unimpressive as working on a checkout can be used to demonstrate teamwork and lots of conflict resolution with difficult customers.

I have so many things to write about, how do I choose which activities to include and which ones to exclude?

The activities you should be including first should be the ones that are able to be emphasised the most and written to match the selection criteria as best possible. It is not just about writing a portfolio full of altruistic activities, or even what the experiences are, rather how they shaped you to be an excellent candidate for the university you are applying to. The way you reflect and the body of experiences both matter.

I have a particular activity that can fit under more than one heading. How do I choose which category to put it in?

If you have an experience that can fit into more than one category then you should put this experience in the particular category that you are choosing to sell/show from this experience. That is the best recommendation. However, if you do place in more than one subsection, the experience **must** be framed differently to fit the qualities specified.

I want to apply to UOW but I am not from a rural area and I don't have any rural experience, should I still apply?

Yes, you should still apply. UOW will have the majority of their students from a rural area however there is still some that have no rural experience at all. It is important to understand that you should be genuinely interested in rural/regional medicine and be willing to do rural placements.

I want to apply to Notre Dame but I don't have any experience or volunteering in any church environments, does this matter?

No, it doesn't. You can get the same thing from being involved in community groups, or sport or creative endeavours like art and music. You don't have to have specific church volunteering experience to be eligible for Notre Dame.

Do the activities we put in the portfolio actually get verified?

The universities will try to verify as many of the activities as they can. Notre Dame specifically say do not rely on any activity which cannot be verified.

I am looking at applying for medicine in the next year or two, what can I do now to build on my portfolio?

We often see students engaging in volunteering roles in the 12 months before applying to med school, and sometimes that's just an unfortunate coincidence, however, it can potentially show as a bit insincere if that's all they have on there. With this in mind, we would still encourage you to engage in volunteering however ensure it is something you are really interested in! This will help alleviate any insincerities because it will be clear you are passionate about it, especially during the interview. Furthermore don't do an activity just for the sake of your portfolio, instead try to see things you already have something to do with, or have an interest in and engage with that, intent and sincerity are key. Also, keep in mind if you are working professionally these experiences can also be used for your examples.



Thank you!

We hope that you found our application guide useful. Many of us at Fraser's know this process, and empathise with how it can seem prohibitively overwhelming. However, now that you have the information, you're already halfway there.

We wish you the best of luck with your upcoming application and look forward to seeing you again, whether that be at upcoming workshops or on the wards.

All the best,
The Frasers Applications Team



est. 2010

Fraser's
GAMSAT TUITION



www.frasersinterview.com.au