

Post-Baccalaureate Health Professions

"Get Ready to Apply" Workshop Series



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Guide to the Common Application:

1. Transcripts and course entry
2. How schools receive test scores
3. When to list LOR Authors

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Transcripts and Course Entry

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Academic History

MUST list every U.S. or Canadian college/university that has any sort of academic record for you, regardless of whether you earned any credit for that work, including:

- Courses that are not required for admission to professional school
- Courses that transferred to another institution
- Courses that you failed or from which you withdrew, whether you repeated them later or not
- Courses you took in high school for college credit that appear on a college transcript
- Courses taken in a Study Abroad program that transferred to a US/Canadian college transcript
- Military coursework



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Transcripts

- Required from every U.S. or Canadian college/university/military institution
- An **official** transcript must be sent directly from the school to the common application service
- Can have transcripts sent before you complete and submit your application

Pro Tip! Order a personal copy several months before you intend to submit your application.



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AP and IB Credit

- Only list in your professional school application if it posted to a US/Canadian transcript
- AP/IB credit only comes with credit hours, not grades
- Be aware: Some schools accept AP/IB credit toward prerequisites, but some don't



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Planned Coursework

- You should list any course that you'd need to take in the coming year to fulfill the prerequisites for any of the schools on your list
- Listing courses as "Planned" does not commit you to actually taking them (in 99% of cases)



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Study Abroad

Three types:

- Grades listed on US/Canadian college transcript (may be your own school or another school)
- Grades only found on the international school's transcript
- "American College Overseas"

Each common application service set its own policies regarding study abroad coursework, so you will need to review the instructions for your common application service to know how to enter it correctly.

- AMCAS and AACOMAS *only* consider coursework that is posted, with a grade, to a US/Canadian transcript (which includes "American College Overseas")
- Other application services—or individual schools—*may* accept foreign transcripts if you pay for a course-by-course evaluation by an international credential evaluation service such as World Education Services. This is relatively rare.



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How do Schools Receive Standardized Test Scores

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Admission Tests

- MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)
- DAT (Dental Admission Test)
- OAT (Optometry Admission Test)
- GRE



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Situational Judgment Tests

- Casper
- Duet
- AAMC PREview



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When to List LOR Authors

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Letter of Recommendation Considerations

- When do I need to list the names of the letter authors?
- Do their letters need to be submitted before I can submit my common application?
- Double check submission requirements with your common application service



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AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, and PTCAS:

- The LOR section can be left blank when you initially submit your common application. Letters can be uploaded later.

CASAA:

- All three LORs must have been requested in order to submit the common app. The app won't be verified until all letters have been received.

CASPA:

- At least two LORs have to have been requested in order to submit the common app. The app won't be verified until those letters have been received.

OptomCAS:

- At least one LOR has to have been requested in order to submit the common app. It won't be verified until that letter has been received.

PTCAS:

- LORs are collected in the "Program Materials" (aka secondary application) section of PTCAS. You can not apply to a given school until the letters have been uploaded to PTCAS.
- Oddity (warn letter authors about this): When prompted, advise letter authors to confirm that they want their evaluation to be automatically submitted to all programs that the applicant is applying to.

VMCAS:

- All three LORs must have been requested in order to submit the common app. The app won't be verified until all letters have been received.



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Letter Storage Services

Pre-Med/Dent: We recommend using a third-party letter service

- Interfolio or PrivateFolio:
 - Your letter writer will upload your letter to the storage service, where it can be stored for as long as you want.
 - Interfolio and PrivateFolio can only transmit letters directly to AMCAS, AACOMAS, TMDSAS, and AADSAS.
- Advantages:
 - Letter writers can complete letters well in advance.
 - You will be able to rest easy knowing that your letters are ready and waiting.
- Disadvantages:
 - For all other professions, your letter authors will be required to upload their letters directly to the common application service.
 - (Small) additional cost to have your letters transmitted to common application service.



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Asking for Letters of Recommendation

1. Who to ask and when to ask for a LOR
2. How to ask for a LOR
3. What to discuss with a potential letter author

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Who to Ask and When to Ask for a LOR

Refer to your **Pre-Application Google Sheet** for a recommended assortment of letter authors

- **Caveat:** Each professional school sets its own LOR assortment requirements. As you research your schools of interest, keep track of their specific LOR requirements.

The best authors:

- Know you well
- Have overseen your work (not a peer) or taught you in a class
- Can share first-hand anecdotes and illustrative examples of time when they've seen you express your personal strengths.

When selecting letter authors, the author's level of professional prestige and/or their connection to a particular school is NOT an important consideration.



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How to Ask for a LOR

Ask in a way that makes it easy for the person to say "no" if they are so inclined:

- "Would you consider writing a letter of recommendation for me?"
- "Do you feel you know me well enough to write a strong, supportive letter?"
- "Can I make an appointment to talk with you and review my preparation?"



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What to Discuss with a Potential Letter Author

During the meeting (in person, if possible)

- Provide:
 - **Guidelines for Writing Compelling Letters of Recommendation** handout
 - Note the topic areas you hope they will be able to discuss
 - Resume of relevant activities
 - Draft of your personal statement
- Ask them to focus on sharing *first-hand anecdotes* about times when they saw you exhibiting relevant competencies and strengths.
- Ask how long they think they'll need to complete the letter (2 to 3 weeks is typical). Add that date to your calendar so that you can send a reminder if necessary.
- Send a thank you note after they have submitted their letter for you.



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Personal Statement

1. Writing Exercise
2. Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

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Writing Exercise

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Emily and Amelia Nagoski,
authors of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*

"The world is an infinite, sucking vortex of need. It is not your job to fill all of the needs. It is your job to do your part.

The key is to figure out which part is your part. How to choose when it's *all* important?"

Guidelines:

1. What kind of problems do I enjoy solving?
2. What kind of people do I love working with?



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Writing Exercise

How did you become interested in pursuing a clinical career in the first place?



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Writing Exercise

Out of all of the healthcare careers, what are the distinctive elements of the one you've chosen that makes it a particularly good fit for your personal strengths, values, goals, and motivations?



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Writing Exercise

What are your guiding principles for effective, compassionate care of sick and injured patients, as informed by:

- Your own experiences interacting with patients in clinical settings
 - The examples set by the clinicians you've shadowed



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Writing Exercise**Left side of page:**

List 4 or 5 of the most impactful experiences that you've had since graduating from high school and that:

- Helped you become the person you are today and/or
- Were instrumental in informing your decision to become a clinician



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Writing Exercise**Left side of page:**

List 4 or 5 of the most impactful experiences that you've had since graduating from high school and that:

- Helped you become the person you are today and/or
- Were instrumental in informing your decision to become a clinician



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Right side of page:

For each item on your list, identify a few ways in which that experience shaped your:

- Personal strengths
- Values
- Motivations

Writing Exercise

Take a moment to wax philosophical:

What do you find satisfying about scientific learning and inquiry, in general?

What excites you about learning about the science of the human body, specifically?



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Writing Exercise**What is the *impact* you hope to make in your clinical career?***

(How do you hope to do better than simply becoming a competent clinician?)

Potential topics could include:

- Your personal approach to patient care
- Strong interest in caring for patients in a certain population
- Research
- Becoming a member of the teaching faculty of an academic institution
- Mentoring role
- Etc.

* What you say here should follow naturally from your history of long-term experiences.



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Writing Exercise

Have you overcome personal hardships, challenges, or obstacles that influenced your educational pursuits?

Did you have any significant fluctuations in your academic record?

... If so, jot down a quick list of factors that you may want to acknowledge in your application so that your reviewers will have context for understanding what you have overcome.



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Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

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Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

Refer to the two sample applications (Exhibit A and Exhibit B) to read the personal statements

Also read "Personal Statement Writing Tips"

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Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

Commonalities among highly effective personal statements:

- The writer wrote multiple drafts over many weeks, got feedback from others, did careful proofreading
- Not a sales pitch, not a comprehensive play-by-play of your experiences
- Focuses on "why"
 - Admissions reviewers want to know **why** you want to be a clinician, not why you think you'll be a good clinician
 - Be specific!
- Conveys the impact that you hope to make in your clinical career

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Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

Commonalities among highly effective personal statements:

- Written as a series of anecdotes/stories and your thoughtful reflections upon them
- Often, the most compelling stories are of situations that were not externally flashy, but they describe experiences that were deeply meaningful to you. They should capture the essence of your motivations to become a clinician.
 - Direct experience is more compelling than observational experience
 - Situations in which you had a high level of competence are more compelling than first-time experiences
 - Focus on the patient's experience. Give the patient a voice.
- You'll have room for just ~3 stories, each carefully chosen because it implicitly conveys your reasons for wanting to become a clinician

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Activity Descriptions

1. Which Activities to Include
2. Tips for Writing Effective Activity Descriptions
3. Most Meaningful Experiences (MD only)

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Which Activities to Include

- You can enter a limited number of your work and extracurricular activities
- Recent experiences (within the past 3 years) and long-term experiences (multiple years) are generally considered most important
- Think broadly about relevance: Many non-clinical/non-research activities are considered highly valuable because they allow you to develop relevant competencies.
- Refer to the list of competencies in your **Pre-Application Google Sheet**
- Each experience you enter should be truly meaningful to you. Do NOT add activities that "look good" but were not important to you. Anything you enter is fair game for an in-depth interview question.
- If space allows, include a "hobbies" entry

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Tips for Writing Effective Activity Descriptions **How to Write About Them?**

- Experience descriptions are different than resume entries: Narrative vs. Sales Pitch
- Include relevant details that might not be explicit in the job title but are very relevant to a future clinical career
 - I.e., jobs that include quite a lot of work with people who are in underserved populations, leadership experience, teaching, critical thinking/problem solving, teamwork/group collaboration, etc.
- Possible Details to Include:
 - What you saw, things you did, the type of setting/environment, types of patients, your level of involvement, who you worked with, etc.



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Tips for Writing Effective Activity Descriptions

Recommended Approach:

- One sentence to describe the experience/organization if it isn't clear from the name
- One or two sentences to convey your level of involvement/scope of responsibility in the activity
- One or two sentences to provide a thoughtful, heartfelt description of the way in which the experience impacted you:
 - Your accomplishments and/or skills you acquired
 - The insights you gained from the experience
 - How the experience shaped your motivations
 - How the experience shaped your personal development
 - ... Do NOT provide a list of technical skills that you have mastered. Avoid jargon.

Detailed tips in the **Detailed Tips for Writing Your Activity Descriptions** handout



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AMCAS Applicants: Three “Most Meaningful Experiences”

- AMCAS allows you to enter up to 15 Work/Activity entries. Each entry has a 700-character field (including spaces) for your experience description.
- Three of your entries can be marked as “Most Meaningful.” For those three, you are given an additional 1,325-character field (including spaces) to explain why they were most meaningful to you.



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Choosing Your Three “Most Meaningful Experiences”

There isn't a strategy here, *except that Shadowing should not be listed as Most Meaningful.*

You should choose authentically, according to the following guidelines:

- Your Most Meaningful Experiences should be ones that:
 - Were transformational in nature: They fundamentally changed or informed who you've become and what you stand for.
 - “If you had not had this experience, how would you be a different person today?”
 - Utilized skills that are transferable to your future work as a clinician



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How to Write About your Most Meaningful Experiences

- Your response in the Experience Description field will be displayed immediately above your response in the Most Meaningful field. Essentially, they will read like one long response.
- In the Experience Description field, start as you normally would, by conveying your level of involvement/scope of responsibility in the activity.
- For the rest of the Experience Description and the Most Meaningful field, reflect upon the ways in which the experience shaped you, especially as it influenced:
 - Your values
 - Your motivations
 - Your understanding of what other people need
 - Your understanding of how you want to engage with others



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Secondary Essays

1. Logistics
2. Writing Tips
3. Common Essay Prompts
4. Dean's Letter of Good Standing

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Secondary Essays: Logistics

- Additional application fee for each school
- Additional essays (expect 2-6 for each school)
- The supplemental app *may* be housed within the common application, or it may be sent to you separately.
 - Pro Tip: If your common application service houses the supplemental applications, submit your common application with *just one school listed* at first. That gets it in the transcript verification queue. Then work on the additional essays for the rest of the supplemental applications and resubmit once complete.
- Submit within 2 weeks (ideally) to 3 weeks (max) of being prompted to do so



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Secondary Essays: Writing Tips

This is an opportunity to explain why you're a good fit for the school and how you align with their mission

- Answer the specific prompt that you are given. Although many prompts are similar from school-to-school, there are usually specific elements in each one that require a tailored response.
- When you write your secondary essays, assume that the reader has already read your common application.
- Follow the same best practices as for personal statement:
 - Engage in thoughtful, authentic self-reflection.
 - Share illustrative examples and stories where space allows. Although the themes you raise may be common among many other applicants, the examples and anecdotes you share will be yours alone.



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Secondary Essays: Writing Tips

This is an opportunity to explain why you're a good fit for the school and how you align with their mission

- Go beyond "that":
 - If you find yourself saying that you are interested in something or that something happened, look for opportunities to develop it further by sharing "whys" and "hows."
- This is NOT a sales pitch! Do not try to force a pre-determined impression on the schools.
- Have an outside person read each essay before you press submit



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Secondary Essays: Common Essay Prompts

Tips for responding to supplemental essay prompts

- Where can I find a list of past supplemental application essay prompts?
- "Why do you want to attend our school?"
- The "Diversity Question"
- "What are some of your unique characteristics, abilities, or skills?"
- "Is there any additional information that you would like the admissions committee to consider?"
- "Describe your current activities."
- "Please tell us any additional information about yourself not already in your application."
- If applying to DO programs: "Why do you want to become an Osteopathic Physician?"
- If applying to PA programs: The autobiographical essay

Detailed suggestions provided on CE Pre-Health website:

Current Students > Preparing Your Written Materials > Tips for Supplemental/Secondary Applications



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Secondary Essays: Common Essay Prompts

When choosing your list of schools, it can be helpful to reference their secondary essay questions to get a sense of what they are looking for in an applicant.

Refer to:

- The Med School Insiders Database
 - <https://medschoolinsiders.com/medical-school-secondary-prompts-database>
- Medical School Headquarters
 - <https://medschoolhq.net/medical-school-secondary-application-essay-library/>
- PA Platform
 - <https://www.thepaplatform.com/supplementallibrary>



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Secondary Essays: Common Essay Prompts

For Instance:

Medical College of Wisconsin

- "The Medical College of Wisconsin is committed to educating health professionals who are dedicated to improving health equity across the diverse populations we serve. Share with us what you have learned or how you have grown through working with or serving people from cultural backgrounds or groups different than your own. How do you believe you can contribute to improving health equity or reducing health disparities as a physician?"
- If you wouldn't have much to say in response to this prompt, then MCW probably isn't a good-bet school for you.

Washington State

- "List the timeframes you have lived in Washington State (does not include visiting; each time frame should be a minimum of 3 months consecutively). List as many timeframes as needed (Month/Year – Month/Year) to accurately account for your lived time in WA. This should not include time in college if you attended outside of WA."
- If you don't have an answer to this, don't apply to Washington State



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Dean's Letter of Good Standing

Some professional schools request a "Dean's Letter of Good Standing" (or simply a "Letter of Good Standing") in their application process. If a Dean's Letter is required by one of your schools, pay attention to whether they are sending a letter from your post-baccalaureate institution (CUI Boulder) or the school where you earned your bachelor's degree.

If you need CUI Boulder to submit a Dean's Letter for you, please follow the procedure listed below:

Using your colorado.edu email address, send an e-mail to studentconduct@colorado.edu to request a Dean's Letter of Good Standing. In that email, include the following information:

- If the school that is requesting the Letter of Good Standing has provided specific prompts that need to be addressed, provide those prompts in your e-mail message.
- Some professional schools have a form that must be filled out. If such a form is provided, attach it to your e-mail (and be sure to reference it in the text of your message).
- Indicate the preferred method of delivery:
 - If the school wants to receive the letter directly via e-mail, provide the e-mail address.
 - If the school wants the letter to be uploaded to your common application, the first step is to add this letter entry to the Evaluations section of your common application, using the following contact information:
 - **Letter Type:** Individual Letter
 - **Primary Author:** Ms. Jessica Menck, Program Manager, Office of Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution, University of Colorado Boulder, 10 UCB, Boulder, CO 80509 (303) 442-5555, studentconduct@colorado.edu
 - If the letter must be uploaded to AMCAS, be sure to download the AMCAS Letter Request Form and attach it to your email to the Student Contact Office. It needs to be included as a cover letter when the Student Contact Office uploads your Letter of Good Standing to AMCAS.

Becoming a Strong Applicant to Professional School

Professional-Specific Details & Prerequisites

Preparing Your Written Application Materials

Navigating the Application Process

Choosing Your Schools

MCAT, DAT, GRE, etc.

Common App and AAMC Profiles

Letters of Recommendation

Preparing for Interviews


After October 1, get started on AHA SA

Dean's Letter of Good Standing

Letters of interest/updates/letters

Upcoming Events

Video Presentations

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Other Essays

1. Other Impactful Experiences (Disadvantaged Status)
2. Disclosing Group Identity
3. Mandatory Disclosure Statements

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Other Impactful Experiences

To provide some additional context around each individual's application, admissions committees are interested in learning more about the challenges applicants may have overcome in life. The following question is designed to give you the opportunity to provide additional information about yourself that is not easily captured in the rest of the application.

Please consider whether this question applies to you. Medical schools do not expect all applicants to answer "yes" to this question. This question is intended for applicants who have overcome major challenges or obstacles. Some applicants may not have experiences that are relevant to this question. Other applicants may not feel comfortable sharing personal information in their application.

Have you overcome challenges or obstacles in your life that you would like to describe in more detail? This could include lived experiences related to your family background, financial background, community setting, educational experiences, and/or other life circumstances.

1325 characters

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Other Impactful Experiences

This question is designed to give you the opportunity to provide additional information about your background or life experience that is not captured elsewhere in the application.

Examples of the types of experiences that are appropriate to share:

- **Family Background** (first-generation college student, serving as a caretaker of a family member, loss of a family member)
- **Financial Background** (e.g., low-income family, worked to support family growing up, work-study to pay for college, participation in federal or state financial support (e.g., Medicaid, food stamps, unemployment compensation), Pell Grant recipient)
- **Community Setting** (e.g., rural area, food scarcity, high poverty or crime rate, lack of access to medical care)
- **Educational Experiences** (e.g., limited educational opportunities, non-traditional student, limited access to advisors or mentors)
- **Other General Life Circumstances** that were beyond your control and impacted your life and/or presented barriers (e.g., religion, illness, traumatic events).

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Disclosing Group Identity

The categories listed below are considered "illegal interview question" topics. Interviewers are not allowed to ask about them unless you disclose them first (either in your application or during the interview).

- Religion
- Gender identity (though there is now a place to provide preferred pronouns on most apps)
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy status
- Disability
- Mental Health Diagnosis and/or traumatic events
- Genetic information
- Citizenship status
- Marital Status or number of children

You may have good reason to bring up some of these topics in your application.

If you do, they are also fair game for interviews.

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Mandatory Disclosure Statements


- Misdemeanor conviction
- Institutional action by a college or university

Quick Pep Talk: These types of issues are common. Young adults sometimes make poor choices.

No need to worry unless:

- You have a recent or ongoing pattern of offenses
- You have a felony conviction, which can prevent you from being licensed as a healthcare professional

... but you must write about the issue in a thoughtful, responsible, and mature manner.

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Mandatory Disclosure Statements

Misdemeanor conviction

"Have you ever been convicted of, or pleaded guilty or no contest to, a Misdemeanor crime, excluding:

1. Any offense for which you were adjudicated as a juvenile
2. Any convictions which have been expunged or sealed by a court, or
3. Any misdemeanor convictions for which any probation has been completed and the case dismissed by the court (in states where applicable)?"

"You need NOT disclose any instance where you:

- Were arrested but not charged
- Were arrested and charged, but the charges were dropped
- Were arrested and charged, but found not guilty by a judge or jury
- Were arrested and found guilty by a judge or jury, but the conviction was overturned on appeal
- Received an executive pardon"



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Mandatory Disclosure Statements

Institutional action by a college or university

"Were you ever the recipient of any institutional action by any college or professional school for unacceptable academic performance or conduct violation, even though such action may not have interrupted your enrollment or required you to withdraw?"

You must answer "Yes" even if the action does not appear on or has been deleted or expunged from your official transcripts due to institutional policy or personal petition."



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How to Write Your Disclosure Statements

1. Make sure the reader understands the timeline ("Ten years ago, in my first year of college ...")
2. State the facts, explaining what happened and what you did to make amends
3. Take responsibility for the poor choices you made in the past: no excuses, no blame on others
4. Reflect on what you learned from the experience *and how you changed your behavior accordingly*
5. Express remorse in a mature manner

Tip: Write disclosure statement(s) in advance, ask for feedback from advisors.



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