



## FOR PA APPLICANTS: TIPS FOR WRITING CASPA EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTIONS

### LOGISTICAL TIPS

- Once you submit your application, you cannot edit any existing Experience entries. You CAN add additional new entries after submission, however.
- Entering ongoing/current experiences:
  - Enter the number of weeks you've actually completed as of your application submission date.
    - Note: Even if you were to list a future end date with a projected total number of weeks you will have completed by then, the processed application will automatically calculate and display only the number of hours you have completed *as of your application submission date*.
- Strategy suggestion for those of you will not yet have met the minimum number of required patient care hours for some of your schools by the time application season opens:
  - If you plan to apply to some schools (such as CU) that have aggressive rolling admissions process and no/low minimum required hours of Patient Care experience, apply early in the application season with only these schools listed at first.
  - Later in the application season, you can log back into your application to add additional Patient Care experience entries. (Remember, you can't edit already-submitted entries, but you *can* add new entries. The strategy here will be to add an additional entry for any ongoing experience – see below.) Now add your remaining schools and re-submit (which will require the payment for those extra schools) so that they'll receive your application once these additional hours have been completed and you've met their minimum requirements.
  - Details on how to do this:
    - When you originally submit your application early in the application season, list any ongoing patient care experiences as "Current." List the total number of weeks you already have completed as of the date when you submit your application.
    - Later in the application season, after completing more patient care hours, log back into the application and add a new Experience entry for each of your ongoing Patient Care experiences, as follows:
      - Start date: The day *after* your original submission date. List it as a "Current" experience. List the additional number of weeks you have completed since originally submitting your application.
      - Experience Title: Use same title as original entry, but add "Continued," such as "Ambulance EMT, Continued"
      - Experience Description: No need to repeat what you already told them about this position. Instead, write, "This is a continuation of my previous [title] entry. I have completed an additional [x] hours of work in this position since originally submitting my application."
      - Be sure to hit "Save" at the bottom of the page.
      - If you want to send the application to additional programs at this time, add them in and resubmit the application.
    - With this approach, your new entries will be available to ALL of your schools, including the ones to which you applied originally. That said, some schools download your application as soon as you submit it, so they may not catch the update unless you alert them.
      - Strategy: Send an email to all of the admissions offices you applied to previously to alert them to the new entry. Bonus: This approach shows you are seriously interested in their program.

## WHICH EXPERIENCES TO INCLUDE ON YOUR APPLICATION

As you think about your past experiences, think broadly about their relevance to your personal development. Select an assortment of meaningful experiences that particularly informed/fostered your:

- Understanding of the career you seek to enter, including:
  - The nature of the work of PAs, including an understanding of the variety of work options in the profession and the differing nature of a PA's work in different clinical settings.
  - Particularly important: Focus on the *patients*. Show that you understand what patients need from their clinicians.
  - Convey awareness of the social factors influencing your intended profession
- Passion for direct service to others
- Style of interpersonal communication
- Approach to teamwork and collaboration
- Understanding of people of different cultural and/or socioeconomic backgrounds
- Understanding of human behavior
- Approach to structured intellectual inquiry (i.e. research experience in any field)
- Capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving when the answer is not clear
- Ability to work well in a team, particularly under stressful circumstances
- Resilience in the face of challenges, ability to learn from experience, capacity for self-reflection

## HOW TO CREATE COMPELLING EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTIONS

### LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Your goal for Experience Descriptions is to convey:
  - What you actually did in each role, communicating your level of responsibility and engagement.
  - How you grew or changed as a result of the experience.
- The character limit for CASPA is 600 characters, including spaces.
- Think quality over quantity. You want to direct your admissions reviewers' attention to the most important experiences that have shaped who you are, what you care about, and why you want to become a PA.
  - If you have had several positions of the same type (for instance, you worked as a barista in several coffee shops), you can group them into a single entry. This approach provides the reviewer with a more streamlined experience.
- Longer-term commitments are generally more informative than short-term experiences. Only include experiences that ended after you graduated from high school, but more recent experiences are considered to be more relevant than those that happened many, many years ago.

### GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTIONS

#### Patient Care Experience

This category applies to experiences in which you are directly responsible for a patient's care. For example: prescribing medication, performing procedures, directing a course of treatment, designing a treatment regimen, actively working on patients as a nurse, paramedic, EMT, CNA, phlebotomist, physical therapist, dental hygienist, etc. (Elisa's note: Medical assistant roles can fall under this category if you developed a high level of skill, had a significant level of responsibility, and/or engaged in decision-making.)

In your Patient Care Experience Descriptions, be sure to include the following:

- Provide **details** on the nature of your patient care responsibilities and scope of practice. Be sure to identify job responsibilities that require a relatively high level of technical skill or decision-making responsibility (i.e., performing or assisting with procedures, drawing blood, administering vaccines, starting IVs, etc.). **Admissions reviewers scrutinize the entries in this section to determine if it meets their standard for "Patient Care."**
- Convey how your patient interaction experiences have:

- Reinforced your interest in entering a career that focuses on patient care
- Informed your personal approach to compassionate, empathetic patient (and family) care

### **Shadowing**

Shadowing is defined as time spent officially following and observing a health care professional at work, preferably in the physician assistant field. (Aim to have shadowed at least 3, but ideally 5+ clinicians in a variety of medical specialties and settings.)

- Reflect upon the insights you gained from observing clinicians:
  - What you have learned about the needs of patients and effective, compassionate approaches to patient care?
  - What you have learned about the nature of the work of a PA?
    - What have you learned about the wide variety of work options within the PA profession?
    - How does the work of a PA differ from that of an NP or a physician?
    - What have you observed about the different nature of practice among PAs in different settings?
    - What are the rewarding parts of this work?
    - What are the inherently challenging parts of this work? How do experienced PAs manage these challenges?

### **Healthcare Experience**

This category applies to paid and unpaid work in a health or health-related field where you are not directly responsible for a patient's care, but may still have patient interaction. Examples include: filling prescriptions, performing clerical work, delivering patient food, cleaning patients and/or their rooms, administering food or medication, taking vitals or other record keeping information, working as a scribe, CNA (if in a low-skill role with no decision-making responsibility), medical assistant, etc.

- What you have learned about the needs of patients and effective, compassionate approaches to patient care?
- What you have learned about the nature of work within a healthcare setting?

### **Research**

Research is defined as involvement in a scholarly or scientific hypothesis investigation that is supervised by an individual with verifiable research credentials. Research may be in any discipline and performed at any site, but it must involve the testing of a hypothesis.

- State your research topic or specific question
- Convey your level of intellectual involvement. Note if you have:
  - Been engaged in reading and discussing relevant primary literature
  - Participated in laboratory meetings on a regular basis
  - Contributed to experimental design
  - Engaged in troubleshooting when the unexpected occurs
  - Written a successful grant proposal
  - Written a research thesis and/or manuscript for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
  - Presented at a conference or poster session
- If results are available, summarize them and briefly indicate why they are interesting/meaningful
- Provide a reflection statement: Why have you have found it intellectually rewarding to engage in this work?

### **Teaching Experience**

Experiences in which you were in charge of instructing others, such as a teaching assistant, tutor, etc.

- Convey your level of responsibility in the teaching role.
- Share your personal approach to serving as an effective teacher to learners with a variety of backgrounds and learning styles.
- Reflect on what you find rewarding about teaching others.

### **Leadership Experience**

Experiences in which you held a leadership role within an organization, such as the president of a club, fraternity/sorority, etc.

- The most relevant entries in this category are those that required interpersonal leadership (rather than taking responsibility for organizing logistics):
  - Convey your responsibilities as a leader.
  - Briefly convey your personal approach to effective leadership. How do you coach others to do their best work to contribute to the group's effort, particularly when they aren't self-motivated to do so?

### **Other Non-Healthcare Employment AND Volunteer Work**

- Convey your level of involvement/responsibility
- Where applicable, share how this experience reinforced your interest in a career focused on service to others and/or intellectual problem-solving
- Reflect upon the personal skills or values shaped by the experience
- Where applicable, explain how certain experiences have given you insight into effective approaches to:
  - Being of service to people in marginalized or underserved populations
  - Effective approaches to collaboration

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Related activities you would like your selected programs to review, such as academic clubs and competitive teams. Do not include paid work experience in this section.

- You may want to create a single “Hobbies” entry, identifying your favorite hobbies. This entry shows that you have other passions, conveys how you relieve stress, and (potentially) allows you to connect with interviewers due to a shared hobby.

### **Honors, Awards, Scholarships**

Only include honors and awards that are truly a big deal. (PA programs will not be swayed by a list of scholarships earned on the basis of good grades; they are evaluating your grades directly.) Provide the selection criteria for your “big deal” awards and honors.

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## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR THE EXPERIENCE SECTION**

### **1. What if I’m not sure which category is most appropriate for a given activity?**

Choose the one that you feel fits best.

- For example, if you worked in a research lab in a dishwashing role (with no involvement in the research itself), then list this position as “Non-Healthcare Employment,” not “Research.”

### **2. What if different aspects of the same experience fit in different categories?**

If different aspects of a given experience clearly fall into separate categories, you can split it into separate entries:

- For example, a full-time clinical research position in which you spent 80% of your time engaged in direct patient care and 20% of your time devoted to intellectual engagement in the actual research process should be listed twice: one Patient Care entry (listed as 30 h/wk) and one Research entry (listed as 10 h/wk), with corresponding duties listed under each entry.

... But caution: Use this approach sparingly. Most people take this approach for just one entry, if at all.

### **3. How should I enter the contact information for the supervisors of my activities?**

Indicate a person who can be contacted by the PA schools and would be able to verify that the experience occurred. For example, you may enter your former supervisor *or* the individual currently in charge. If the experience was a student-organized group and there is no official supervisor, you may list a staff member in the Student Affairs Office who can verify your experience. For certain entries, such as hobbies, you can list yourself as the contact.

### **4. Why am I asked to provide inclusive dates, hours per week, and total hours?**

These entries give application reviewers a sense of how much time you spent on each activity. If you spent a lot of time on a given activity, your interviewers will expect you to have more in-depth knowledge of the activity than if you spent just a little time on it.