



Pearls & Pitfalls

MEDICAL ADVISING

Strategic Medical Advising for future physicians by physicians

Secondaries Writing Resource Guide

Secondaries are your opportunity to align yourself with each school and showcase – specifically and explicitly – why you want to be a doctor who trains *at that institution*.

This resource guide will provide insight into what makes secondaries successful (the pearls) as well as illuminate common mistakes (the pitfalls) to avoid.

The high-yield version is below:

Pearls

- Return secondaries within 2 weeks of receipt. If possible, return the schools at the top of your list within 2 days
- Prewrite your secondaries:
 - First, prioritize your school list – legitimately go through and number each school accounting for your competitiveness at that school (everyone would love to rank NYU, Hopkins, or Einstein number one for the free tuition, but be reasonable in your likelihood at each institution)
 - Use prospectivedoctor.com to find previous years' secondary prompts for each school
 - Write out full responses to last year's prompts for your top five schools
 - For schools 6 and above, brainstorm and outline your responses
 - If you finish outlining for each school, go back to school 6 and start writing full responses
- Answer the question first, support after
- Why This School Question – choose at least one very specific thing to highlight in each of the following categories:
 - **General** - location, notoriety, mission statement, values, patient population served
 - **Curriculum** -
 - Preclinical: problem-based, flipped classroom, systems based, early access to clinical education, specific tracks (leadership track, public health track, etc)
 - Clinical: where will you be learning for clinical rotations? Large academic center, community hospitals, outreach clinics, private practice, rural, urban, etc
 - **Extracurriculars** - research, groups you'd like to be involved in/contribute to, outreach opportunities
- Provide applicable anecdotes/vignettes to support your answers
- “What other things would you like to add?” Question – if the school has not already asked “Why this school?” – provide your answer to why that school in that area

Pitfalls

- Not answering the question being asked
- Copy and pasting full responses between schools (DO NOT submit a secondary with another school's name in it!)
- Spending too much time on the hardship rather than on growth
- Being general in your responses – the secondaries are how schools determine mission fit and whether or not you will uniquely contribute to that specific community

What secondary questions are giving you the most frustration? Happy to dive in below!

Most Common Secondary Prompts

1. Why This School?

This is an incredibly important question for you to answer for yourself, and to answer on the secondary as detailed and specifically as possible. They already know you want to be a doctor. The Admissions Committee wants to know why you want to be a doctor who trained *there*. My general recommendation is to think about this in three different categories, and have at least one very specific thing for each category:

- General - location, notoriety, mission statement, values, patient population served
- Curriculum -
- Preclinical: problem-based, flipped classroom, systems based, early access to clinical education, specific tracks (leadership track, public health track, etc)
- Clinical: where will you be learning for clinical rotations? Large academic center, community hospitals, outreach clinics, private practice, rural, urban, etc
- Extracurriculars - research, groups you'd like to be involved in/contribute to, outreach opportunities

If you are able, it's also important to provide examples of why you are interested in those opportunities. For example "Because of my history as elected class secretary for the class of 2020, I am very interested in pursuing a student government role that would allow me to utilize and improve upon my leadership, collaboration, and logistical-planning skills."

2. The Diversity Question

This question generally comes in two flavors:

- How have you served a population or group diverse from you? My recommendation here is to provide an applicable anecdote and provide insight into why/how that experience impacted you
- How will you contribute to the diversity of the class? Here, you can go a multitude of ways. A general consideration is to utilize your unique experiences, and/or combination of experiences, to show why you are open minded and will be able to contribute to a group of high-performing individuals with similar goals

3. The Adversity Question

A good rule of thumb here is to acknowledge the hardship and then spend the majority of your time focusing on what you learned and gained from that adverse experience. Reflecting on the lessons and insights.

4. The Covid Question

It will be interesting to see if or how this question is utilized (or not) this cycle. My recommendation here is to be candid, authentic, and provide your experience as well as the insights and values you gained from that universal experience.

5. The What Other Things Would You Like to Add

This, in my opinion, is a uniquely annoying question because you have already provided so much information about yourself, your goals, and your experiences. If you truly have something to add, go for it. But if not, you can either leave this blank OR if the school has not asked a "why this school" question, you can add your "why this school" here.

Where to Find Past Prompts

- ProspectiveDoctor.com - <https://www.prospectivedoctor.com/medical-school-secondary-essay-prompts-database/>
- MedSchool Explorer - <https://explorer.medschoolcoach.com/>