

The ESP Student Blog

“Mindful Learning – Developing Entrustable Skills”

Volume 003 – How Can The Core Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) Help My Residency Application?

What do I know about the EPAs from the previous blog entry?

1. You’ve learned that the EPAs are a list of 13 basic clinical activities that are expected of all medical graduates.
2. You’ve also learned that the EPAs have been formally documented by the AAMC as a result of concern by the residency program directors with the uneven preparation of medical graduates.
3. And, finally, you’ve learned that the ESP has entrustable thinking built-in. You can learn enough from the ESP to communicate what you know about your EPA abilities in terms of how you have to think.

How can I demonstrate entrustable thinking in my residency application?

You have two opportunities to personally demonstrate entrustable thinking:

1. You can grab their attention in your personal statement
2. You can confirm and embellish your personal statement in the interview.

The personal statement can be strategically organized to immediately focus attention on your awareness of the EPAs. If you know how to direct attention to the content of your personal statement, you can control the direction of the interview.

How do I convey that I am entrustable in my personal statement?

As you organize the information to include in your personal statement, you have to make sure that you communicate through the Jungian type of the person reading it. People unconsciously communicate through their type, so they will respond strongest to content that is easiest to interpret. If a sensing type is reading the statement, their preference for facts and details will cause them to read for the experiences you have had and they will use those details to evaluate the quality of that experience. They will be less interested in your interpretation of the long-range implications of that experience. In contrast, the intuitive type reader is going to follow their preference for a big picture, which includes your view of your future self. They will be looking for how your experiences have shaped your future.

The obvious problem is that you can’t predict the type of the reader. However, you can compose the personal statement to reach both the Sensing type and the Intuitive type readers. These are the two primary drivers of perception and if you can compose a statement that hits at both, not only will you be sure that it will be read with interest and understanding, you will also have composed a more complete representation of yourself.

How should I write about my experiences in medical school?

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Start by developing a list of specific EPA vignettes that describe both clinical and pre-clinical experiences you have had. These cannot be as extensive as the examples given in the [AAMC Learners Guide](#), and should instead be selected highlights. By using at least one pre-clinical EPA example, you will give the impression that you didn't just wait until year three to get serious about developing yourself. Since you will have a word limitation, you will need to narrow your initial list to four or five EPA vignettes, or even fewer. For each EPA vignette specify the relevant details such as the setting (who, what, how, etc.). Then specify the outcomes of the activity and evaluate whether it was good enough or not good enough. Continue to evaluate any weaknesses you discovered and how they were addressed; then continue with positive outcomes and speculate plans for reinforcement. This will complete your focus on both types of readers: Sensing types (setting) and Intuitive types (evaluation and plans).

How do I decide on a pre-clinical EPA vignette?

An example of a pre-clinical EPA vignette could be a group activity, such as the ESP Step 1 Prep Question Analysis method, where you presented your own rationale to support opinions or arguments. Note which of the EPAs are addressed, in this case it would be EPA 2, EPA 4, EPA 6, EPA 7, and EPA 9. When this is all pulled together in the statement itself, you can focus on a few of the more relevant EPAs to confirm your awareness of entrustable skill building. Other comparable situations can suffice as long as you developed your own rationales and didn't rely on memorized facts or rules. Always explain “why.”

How do I decide on the clinical EPA vignettes?

An example of a clinical EPA vignette would come from your clerkship rotations, but unless you are drawing a contrast between specialties, this is where you will also explain your specialty choice. In this case, all of the EPAs apply, so you will want to select from them the better illustrations of entrustable behavior. At this point, you will be making a very important statement in the most convincing way possible: *You didn't wait for someone else to tell you to be entrustable, you did it for yourself!*

How do I bring all of my vignettes together into a draft of my personal statement?

By choosing your own starting point and by the very nature of your own experiences, you have the freedom to get creative and make yourself unique. This is exactly like the medical school application. Your personal statement will unfold as a narrative about your experience that portrays your awareness of what professional development means. You should have others read it for syntax and usage, and also because you become blinded to what you are writing and fresh eyes will see things not obvious to you. Perhaps the most difficult part of the statement will be simply getting started. It is not obvious when you read well written prose, but good writing doesn't follow from good speaking. However, go ahead and start writing the way you speak, but then refine it to make it more readable. More writing tips can be found at the SuccessTypes website at the [Reference Documents](#) link.

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What do I need to know to be ready for in an interview?

The program director is wanting to find out if you are going to be a problem or a solution. Problem residents are externally controlled (external locus of control). They assign blame for mistakes and errors and they expect to be told what to do. There is a difference in being told what to do and what needs to be done. In transactional analysis terms, a problem resident would be in a “child” role and expects the program director to function as a “parent.” Solution residents, by comparison are internally controlled (internal locus of control). They have the growth mindset that analyzes mistakes to learn from them and assumes responsibility for their actions. They will seek directions when indicated but with the intent to use their own judgment (entrustable thinking). In transactional analysis terms, a solution resident is in the “adult” role and expects the same from the program director.

What are the two main types of interview questions and how do I handle them?

Be prepared for two types of questions.

1. Questions about your experiences.
2. Questions about abstract or hypothetical situations.

When asked about your experiences, follow the pattern in your personal statement. Give a description of what happened without making assumptions about the values and beliefs of others involved, and then lead into what you learned to apply in the future. If appropriate, you could state goals you have set or criteria you use to evaluate yourself. Self-directed, self-evaluation is a good thing.

When asked about hypothetical situations, attempt to apply experiences you have had that may have a bearing, i.e. “This is like a situation I was in during my surgery rotation...” If you cannot credibly connect your own experience acknowledge the lack of experience and then spell out the options that you believe are open to you. Bring in knowledge you hope to gain to deal with such situations. If it is one of those dreaded ethical dilemmas that appear to have no clear solution, remember that no physician makes ethical decisions alone. Hospitals and clinics have ethics committees that review difficult situations.

How do I sum up that I should be hired to work on a program director’s clinical service?

In your own words let the program director know that you had two goals: First, to show that you are self-directed and that you know what that means and, second, to learn from the interview and the way it was conducted to confirm your interest in their program. Cite an example, if appropriate, of what was asked about or the response and follow up to one of your replies. This approach has the hidden advantage that it will cause you to pay more attention to the conversation. Everyone enjoys being listened to, even program directors.

And, finally, my best wishes for a happy Match Day!