



# *Western's Abbreviated Autobiographical Sketch (AABS)*

*My Approach to Writing it*

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Hey MMC!

I was drafting up a response to a question in the #application-process thread and ended up writing for quite a while so I thought I'd post this instead.

The AABS is a fantastic way to showcase your passions, explain what you've learned, and how they will help you as a physician. I personally think that this addition to the application process is what got me into Schulich but who really knows! Any who, I've outlined some tips that I found helpful below:

## **PRE-WRITING PREP**

Read over the stems for each of the AABS's sections first before you do anything else (ex. Leadership). Really try to get a sense for what it is they are looking for in YOUR opinion, then read the CanMeds roles and try to formulate connections between them (some are obvious, and some are not but don't get too bogged down by this step).

## **ALLOCATING YOUR ABS EXPERIENCES**

Next, create a word doc or excel sheet with columns/rows for each section of the AABS (leadership, etc) then look through your pool of ABS experiences and divide them into those categories. NOTE: you don't have to limit 1 experience to 1 AABS category, if you feel like it fits in >1 then put it in both. At this stage it doesn't matter!

Once you have divided them all, you are ready to start deciding which ones really fit that section the strongest AND (or more importantly in my opinion) which ones you would like to highlight.



## DIVIDING CANMEDS

Next, go through the CanMeds roles in detail again. Start thinking about your experiences in relation to the CanMeds roles loosely just to get the old brain thinking. The next step is to divide the CanMeds roles, more specifically their “Key Topics”, into the AABS sections. Same as with your experiences, you can put one Key Topic into multiple AABS sections so long as it makes sense in your opinion. You also should be pretty flexible here given that how relevant they actually are to the section is going to be more dependent on the experiences you choose to write about so don’t sweat this too much.

## THINK BIG PICTURE

Now, it’s helpful to think big picture before getting into the nitty gritty so as to avoid writing a bunch of stuff then realizing what you wrote is a bit of a stretch for that section. In order to do that, you need to think about the following things:

- The themes you want to write about
- The structure of your writing
- The writing itself
- And your approach to the mysterious rubric

## CRAFTING THEMES

Now, you looked over CanMeds and divided their Core Roles and Key Concepts into the AABS sections which you also have your experiences divided into. Look through your experiences and add the CanMeds Key Topics to the ones you feel they roughly fit best (often once you start writing you will realize one fits better or one doesn’t fit at all; it’s early in the writing process so don’t worry too much for now). Once you have linked these things together, start thinking about the themes you want to talk about (i.e. the section topic, ex. leadership, and how it relates to a CanMeds role and how you can link that to your experience). Go through each and jot down some point form notes about Skills/Responsibilities/Examples of you doing something from each experience then see which CanMeds Key Topics fit those “Themes”.

## STRUCTURING YOUR WRITING

To think backwards, first think about the structure of your writing. How are you going to orient your paragraph? Remember, you have 3 main things you need to accomplish:

- 1) Showcase the responsibilities of whatever experience you chose to highlight + what you are proud of (if you can fit it and it is relevant)
- 2) Explain what skills you were able to develop/continue to develop in this role (note that responsibilities can also be skills so 1 & 2 are often the same thing/you can make them the same thing)
- 3) How this experience and the skills you developed will help you as a physician



Now, decide how you will structure each section based on those goals. A common one is:

- 1 paragraph on the role
- 1 on the skills
- 1 of the relevance to medicine

This is a great way to orient it, but I found another way that I felt worked better for me (although it takes a lot of workshopping and editing your paragraphs because it's a bit more stressful word count wise). The way that I structured each section is as follows:

- 3-4 short paragraphs in each section (ex. in the leadership section), each focusing on a different skill or example within that section's overall chosen experience that you can:
  - a) Link directly to the CanMeds roles
  - b) That you believe fit within that AABS's section the best
  - c) And that you believe showcases the experience you chose the best
- Ex. Leadership section --> President of Club:
  - o Leading Change
  - o Active Participant-Architect
  - o Systems Thinking

So, the whole thing would look like this:

- > Intro to experience: What is it and who were you to it?
- > Introduce FIRST responsibility/skill/example
- > Link to that AABS section
- > Link to one or two (or maybe three in some cases) CanMeds roles and how it would help you as a physician
- > Introduce SECOND responsibility/skill/example
- > Link to that AABS section
- > Link to one or two (or maybe three in some cases) CanMeds roles and how it would help you as a physician
- > Introduce THIRD responsibility/skill/example
- > Link to that AABS section
- > Link to one or two (or maybe three in some cases) CanMeds roles and how it would help you as a physician
- Maybe a fourth one if possible but quality over quantity always*

Now, it doesn't need to directly be in that order, for example, you could introduce the CanMeds role and how it's a core part of being a physician then link your experience in afterwards. That much is up to you and your writing style. But either way I found this to be a really good systematic way to write this thing.



## WRITING

Have a thesaurus open always, then just write and write and write and write. You should utilize key words or phrases in CanMeds as that will help you. I tried to use synonyms to words if I felt it was a little too obvious, but do this at your discretion. Additionally, once you start writing you can use the Enabling competencies that are subdivisions of the Key Competencies/Topics as a roadmap for your connections! I found them very helpful.

## WORKING THE RUBRIC

Remember, they are scoring your app using a scoring matrix/rubric. What that means is they are being systematic and when there is a system, there is a way for you to orient your approach to optimally present to that system (i.e. write in a way that follows what you think the scoring matrix is like, which of course no one really knows but the above has been general principles)!

—> Try to avoid using the same experience >1 time (novel experiences are rumored to score higher, nothing to back this up but it makes sense doesn't it?)

—> Try to avoid using the same Key Topics too many times, your goal is to showcase how well rounded of an applicant you are and that translates into how well rounded you fit the CanMeds roles

—> Quality > quantity no matter what; 2 paragraphs worth 10 points each is better than 4 paragraphs worth 3 points each right!)

—> Focus on making strong connections from your experience to CanMeds and the AABS section, that is what they are scoring you on!

—> DO NOT stretch for connections; it won't help your scoring and it will feel disingenuous (ex. trying to link captain of hockey team to interpretation of diagnostic procedures. There are easier ones to do like captain of hockey team to personal leadership skills or priority setting or quality improvement or conflict resolution etc.)

—> remember, it is better to showcase what you love than to try and connect empty experiences. They can usually tell when you don't care about something on an app, but they will absolutely be able to tell in the interview!

*Hope that helps and happy writing!!*

