

Autobiographical Sketches (ABS)

How to Make the Most of 150 Characters



**EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING HUB**

1. **Start by listing all your employment, formal education, extracurriculars, awards, research activities, volunteer experiences, and “others” for the time period indicated.**
 - You can include both structured (volunteering for a community organization), and unstructured activities (mowing the neighbour’s lawn while they recovered from illness).
 - Once you have created an exhaustive list, remove experiences that have little impact or do not add value, e.g., a paper route at the age of 16 that you quit after a few weeks.

2. **Demonstrate the essential qualities/competencies that the program emphasizes and the SKILLS you have.**
 - Why was this experience significant?
 - What skills or attributes did you use or gain?
 - How did you add value? What did you accomplish?
 - Avoid basic descriptions of the activity or repeating exact phrasing or information in multiple experiences
 - Quantify (use numbers) and qualify (use specific examples) when appropriate.

3. **Use each character strategically.**
 - Ensure your writing is concise, e.g., “Collected data” over “I assisted with data collection”. “Coached varsity rugby team” over “Played a leadership role as a coach”.
 - Be precise, e.g., “Presented 8 criteria for determining...” over “Made available many suggestions for criteria that can help determine...”
 - Use a thesaurus! Have you used the most powerful, specific word you can? Is there a shorter word with the same impact?
 - Use numerals instead of words e.g., 8 instead of eight.
 - Shorthand and point forms are OK, e.g., “~” instead of “approximately”, “PCR” instead of “polymerase chain reaction”.

4. **Start early with identifying and reaching out to potential verifiers for each of your entries.**
 - While not all verifiers will be contacted, assume they will.
 - Obtain their permission and let them know when they might be contacted. Emphasize the importance of the reference they give and ask if there is additional information you can provide them with.
 - A verifier’s reliability and ability to provide a strong, positive reference is more important than their rank or title. That might mean asking your direct supervisor over the program director with whom you rarely had contact.
 - Avoid using inaccurate, dishonest, or embellished information. Ensure there will be consistency between your words and what your verifier will say.

References:

[Perdue Online Writing Lab](#)

[University of Ottawa, Faculty of Medicine](#)

[BeMo: How To Make Your OMSAS Autobiographical Sketch Stand Out in 2021](#)

[MEDAPPLICATIONS: Autobiographical Sketch for Medical School](#)