

Avoid These Common Application Mistakes

Your PTCAS application is more than a checklist, it is your opportunity to **tell your story** and demonstrate why you are prepared to become a physical therapist at the Arkansas Colleges of Health Education. Each year, we see qualified applicants miss opportunities to showcase their experiences, accomplishments, and unique qualities. Before submitting your application, take a few minutes to review these common mistakes and recommendations from our Admissions Committee.

I. Complete Every Applicable Section

The most common mistake we see is an incomplete application. Many applicants leave sections blank or provide minimal information, even when they have valuable experiences that could strengthen their application. Before submitting, ask yourself:

- Have I included all leadership experiences?
- Have I documented volunteer and service activities?
- Have I listed employment experiences?
- Have I included club memberships, student organizations, athletics, military service, research, or other meaningful involvement?
- Have I fully described my experiences and responsibilities?

Remember: **The admissions committee can only evaluate the information you provide.** Do not assume reviewers will find details elsewhere in your application.

II. Don't Make Us Search for Information

A common mistake is discussing important experiences in essays or supplemental responses without documenting them elsewhere in the application. For example, if you write about leadership, volunteerism, research, athletics, military service, or employment experiences in your essays, make sure those experiences are also included in the appropriate PTCAS sections (see below).

III. Make Your Personal Statement Personal

One of the most memorable applications includes a thoughtful and authentic personal statement. Avoid writing a generic essay that could apply to almost any applicant. Your personal statement should help us get to know the person behind the application. **Don't be afraid to be genuine.** The strongest personal statements often share meaningful experiences, personal growth, and lessons learned rather than simply describing what physical therapists do.

IV. Share Your Experiences and Use the Correct Categories

Many applicants underestimate the value of their experiences. If an experience contributed to your growth, skills, or preparation for a career in physical therapy, it likely belongs somewhere in your application. PTCAS provides several categories for documenting your experiences. **Be sure to place experiences in the section that best represents the nature of the activity.**

Employment

Do not underestimate the value of non-healthcare employment. Working in various industries often develops communication skills, time management, adaptability, teamwork, conflict resolution, and

professionalism, all qualities that are important for future physical therapists. Include **paid work experiences** such as:

- Physical therapy or rehabilitation technician/aide positions
- Food service and restaurant positions
- Leadership positions in the workplace
- Small business ownership or entrepreneurship
- Exercise specialist or fitness professional roles
- Healthcare employment
- Retail, customer service, or hospitality positions
- Childcare or camp counselor positions
- Military employment
- Teaching, tutoring, mentoring, or coaching roles
- Other paid positions that demonstrate responsibility, professionalism, leadership, communication, or service

Important: Paid clinical experiences should be listed under Employment, not Observation Hours.

Extracurricular Activities

Don't overlook these experiences! Include activities outside of the classroom that demonstrate involvement, leadership, teamwork, and personal growth, such as:

- Student organizations and clubs
- Leadership positions in clubs, fraternities, and sororities
- Student government
- Collegiate athletics and club sports
- Professional organization membership or leadership
- Research organizations
- Campus leadership roles

Observation Hours

Observation experiences should consist of **unpaid** experiences where you are observing or learning from physical therapists or other professionals in clinical practice. Examples include:

- Shadowing experiences
- Volunteer observation in physical therapy settings
- Experiences across multiple practice settings (i.e., hospital, outpatient, adults, pediatrics, etc.)

Research

Research experiences help demonstrate critical thinking, problem-solving, scientific inquiry, and collaboration. These experiences should be documented in the Research section. Examples may include:

- Research assistant positions
- Faculty-mentored research projects
- Honors theses and capstone projects
- Research laboratory experiences
- Data collection and analysis activities
- Manuscript or abstract preparation
- Poster or platform presentations
- Independent research projects

Volunteer and Community Enrichment

Include service activities performed without compensation that contribute to your community or support others. Examples may include:

- Community service projects
- Nonprofit organization involvement
- Faith-based service activities

- Coaching or mentoring
- Fundraising efforts
- Community outreach programs
- Advocacy work
- Service-learning experiences

Volunteer experiences often help demonstrate a commitment to service, compassion, leadership, and community engagement.

V. Review Your Application Before Submitting

Before you click "Submit," perform one final review:

- ☐ All applicable sections are complete
- ☐ Your personal statement reflects your unique story
- ☐ Experiences are categorized correctly
- ☐ Leadership, research, volunteerism, employment, and extracurricular activities are included
- ☐ Paid clinical experiences are listed under Employment rather than observations
- ☐ Observation hours are documented appropriately
- ☐ Grammar, spelling, and formatting have been reviewed
- ☐ Someone else has reviewed your application for completeness

Final Thoughts

The strongest applications are often the **most complete and authentic**. Give yourself credit for the experiences that have shaped you, tell your story thoughtfully, and provide the admissions committee with a full picture of who you are. We look forward to learning more about you and your journey toward becoming a physical therapist.