

Self-Reflection Guide for Medical Students

Developing Your
Professional Identity



What is Professional Identity?

Professional identity formation (PIF) is a journey of personal development and social construction. It is the process of enculturation into the actions, interactions, values, and norms of the medical profession. Professional identity has long been claimed to be the fundamental goal of the learning process in medical education (Cook, et al., 2010).

Medical students are encouraged to reflect and interpret experiences while in training and create meaning. Students seek a steady alignment between themselves and their environment. When that equilibrium is disrupted, it can activate cognitive and/or affective discomfort or tension. Processing this dissonance through self-reflection, expressed in writing or inner dialogue, can bolster emotional resilience and overall well-being.



←—————→
Three domains that influence Professional Identity Formation



UT Health
Texas A&M University

The importance of values

Your values highlight what you stand for and represent your unique individual essence. Research has found that individuals experience greater fulfillment when they live by those values. However, when values are not honored, mental, emotional, and physical states can suffer. Values change and evolve throughout a lifetime. It is important to regularly assess your personal and professional values to better understand how your identity as a physician takes form.

See pages 19-20 for examples of values.



Reflection is an
effective and
powerful paradigm
to boost Professional
Identity Formation



“Reflection is a metacognitive process that occurs before, during, and after situations with the purpose of developing greater understanding” (Sanders, 2009)

**ALLOWS FOR THE
CONSTRUCTION OF
MEANING**

**PROMOTES
INDIVIDUAL AND
PROFESSIONAL
WELLBEING**

**INTERNALIZES
LEARNING IN BOTH
COGNITIVE AND
AFFECTIVE DOMAINS**

**FRAMES EXPERIENCES
ACROSS VARIOUS
PERSPECTIVES AND
MINDSETS**

Purpose of Self-Reflection Guide

The goal of this reflection guide is to support medical students in your professional identity formation and provide a framework to:

- Understand how you think, feel, and see the world.
- Strengthen skills in self-awareness, curiosity, wellness, relationships, teamwork, conflict management, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, cultural competence, and communication.
- Assess and analyze your capabilities, performance, interests, and career aspirations. Understanding these concepts will present the narrative that will help you in your residency application and interviews.



Use the photos in this guide to cultivate further reflection.



Strategies for Self-Reflection

- **Practice reflection during milestone training experiences and events.** There are a variety of moments throughout your medical school experience where self-reflection can be really valuable.
- **Create an environment for reflection.** Be intentional about setting aside time to reflect and create an environment free from distractions. Take a deep breath and empty the mind by entering reflective space without judgement or preconceived notions.
- **Get out of your comfort zone and question yourself.** To help uncover thoughts and feelings, ask yourself questions. Don't allow the prompts in this guide to serve as parameters in your reflection.
- **Complement reflection with tools that inspire you.** Use art, literature, photography, music, etc. to stimulate thought and expression.
- **Embrace imperfection.** Whether using inner dialogue or written journaling, do not feel the need to strive for perfection. For example, don't worry about grammar and spelling if journaling.

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.



- What identities currently define you? Which are most important to you?
- What values are most important to you? How do you live them out in your life?
- Describe your personal and professional vision for the future.
- What, or who, motivated you to pursue a career in medicine?
- What do you expect of yourself in the first year of medical school? What do others expect of you?
- What are you most excited about doing in medical school?
- What does your white coat mean to you?
- What interests you most about a medical career?
- What defines failure? What is your relationship with it?
- In your experiences, what triggers unhealthy stress responses?
- Describe a time you felt really stressed and what you did (or didn't do) to look after yourself (or not).
- Describe a time you felt foolish or were afraid of looking foolish.
- Describe a time you were unable to see friends/family because of school obligations. How did this make you feel?
- Describe a time you ignored your own signals (bodily or emotional) of threat. What was the outcome?
- Name something you have been trying to achieve. What obstacles have been preventing you from getting there?
- What personal and professional qualities make a good peer/colleague?
- Describe a time learned purely through observation.
- Explore your feelings of imposterism.
- What did you experience or achieve this past year that made you proud?
- What was the most challenging hurdle you faced this year? What did you learn from it?
- Did you take any personal or professional risks this year? What did you learn from them?
- Who did you build a positive relationship with? What drew you to this person?
- How has your perception of medicine evolved after completing first year?



Suggested Reflection Prompts for First-Year Students



Prompts for Language of Medicine

- Reflect on the altruism of the body donor and their contribution to human kind. Consider their decision and possible reasons why they chose to donate their body to education and research.
- Consider the sacrifice of the loved ones who honored the donor's wishes.
- Reflect on the emotional impact of cadaveric dissection and how you overcame possible reservations.
- Reflect on the impact of body donation on your sense of altruism, empathy, and compassion.
- Describe how the dissection experience has contributed to the development of your professional identity and sense of purpose.
- Reflect on the shared experience with your fellow students and the value of your tank dissection team.
- Describe how the experience of learning from a body donor has impacted your view of mortality, disease, and human suffering.
- Reflect on the value of the dissection experience in facilitating your ability to balance objective scientific process with the empathy required of a future physician.





- What identities currently define you? Which are most important to you?
- What values are most important to you? How do you live them out in your life?

- What makes you feel most alive?
- What is something that amazes you?
- Describe a time you learned something from failure?
- Describe an interaction that made you feel uncomfortable.
- Describe a time you compared yourself to your past or future self.
- Describe a time you compared yourself to others.
- How have positive and/or negative emotions affected you?
- Describe a time you encouraged or comforted someone, how did it make you feel?
- Describe a leadership experience. What was most meaningful?
- Write about another student who taught you something.
- Describe an experience surrounding conflict. What triggered it, what was the outcome? What did you learn?
- What is your greatest health-related fear? Why?
- Describe how another student might remember you based on an incident or encounter you shared.
- Describe a time when one of your values or beliefs were challenged.
- Describe a social issue/cause that is important to you.
- Describe a time when you felt you did not have a voice. What barriers prevented you from speaking out?
- Describe a time when you had to make a difficult decision.
- Describe your most recent experience as a patient. Has your experience/relationship with a doctor changed since starting medical school?
- How would you define the following words: Hope, courage, joy, service,

- What did you experience or achieve this past year that made you proud?
- What was the most challenging hurdle you faced this year? What did you learn from it?
- Did you take any personal or professional risks this year? What did you learn from them?
- Who did you build a positive relationship with? What drew you to this person?
- How has your perception of medicine evolved after completing second-year?



Suggested Reflection Prompts for Second-Year Students

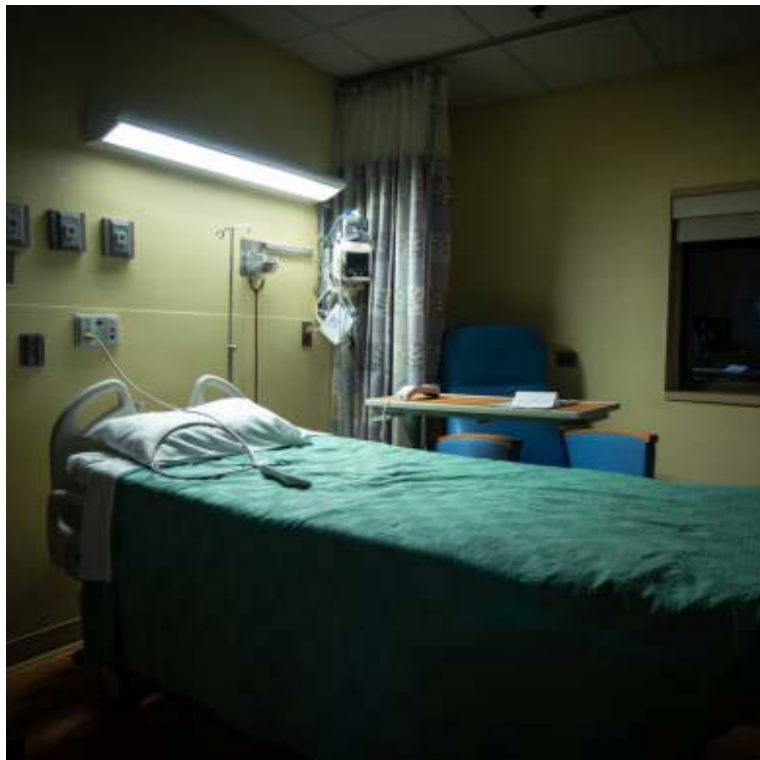


Suggested Reflection Prompts for Third-Year Students

- What identities currently define you? Which are most important to you?
- What values are most important to you? How do you live them out in your life?
- Describe a time you felt envious of someone else.
- How have your clerkship experiences affected you physically? mentally? emotionally?
- Describe a time you encouraged or comforted someone.
- Write about a colleague who taught you something.
- Whether through observation or personal experience, describe a situation involving conflict.
- Describe a time when one of your values or beliefs were challenged.
- Describe a time when you received critical feedback. How was it given? How did it make you feel?
- Describe a time when you were put on the spot.
- Describe a time you had to communicate with a patient who didn't speak your language.
- Describe a time when you may have felt lesser than or different from other people.
- Describe a time you witness/experienced poverty.
- Reflect on the last time you cried or laughed.
- Describe a time you felt discouraged.
- Reflect on a lesson(s) you were taught by a patient.
- Describe a night on call or night shift.
- Describe a time when a patient asked you a personal question. How did you respond?
- Describe the patient population that interests you. Why do you think this is?
- Reflect on the experience of someone who is suffering in a way that is invisible to others.
- Describe a time when a patient's cultural or socio-economic orientation altered their course of treatment.
- Describe your 'favorite' patient and your most challenging patient.
- How would you define the following words: Love, family, empathy,

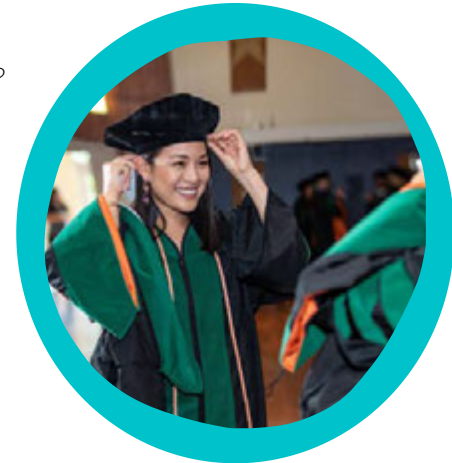


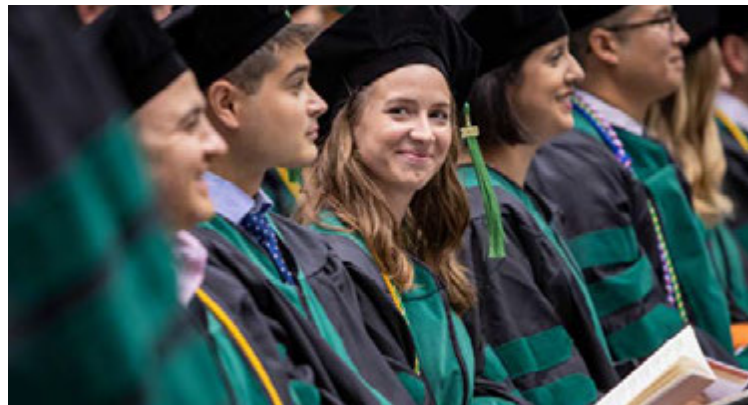
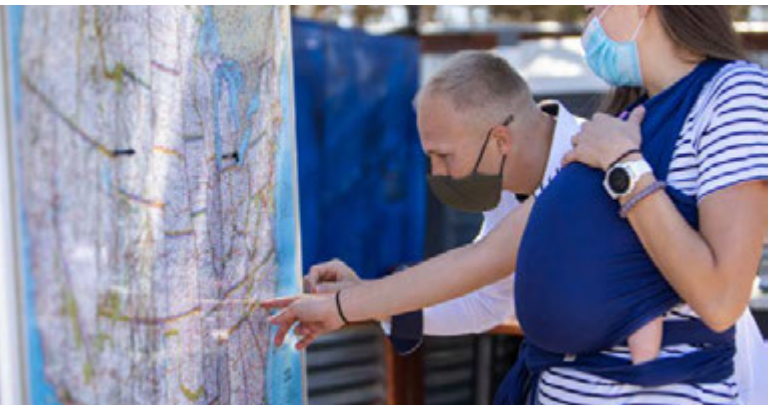
- What did you experience or achieve this past year that made you proud?
- What was the most challenging hurdle you faced this year? What did you learn from it?
- Did you take any personal or professional risks this year? What did you learn from them?
- Who did you build a positive relationship with? What drew you to this person?
- How has your perception of medicine evolved after completing third-year?




Suggested Reflection Prompts for Fourth-Year Students

- What identities currently define you? Which are most important to you?
- What values are most important to you? How do you live them out in your life?
- Describe a time when you had to deliver (good or bad) news to someone. How did it make you feel?
- Describe the strengthening or disintegration of a relationship or team you have been a part of.
- Describe a time you felt offended by something or someone.
- What is important to you in a professional relationship?
- Describe a mistake you have made or witnessed.
- Describe how you want to be remembered to your medical school peers.
- Describe a time when one of your values or beliefs were challenged.
- Describe a time someone trusted you to carry out something important.
- What personal and professional advice would you give your past self?
- Describe a time you doubted yourself.
- Describe the times in your life that have contributed to your resilience.
- How have interactions with other healthcare professionals affected your understanding of your own professional identity?
- Describe someone you admire and why.
- How would you define the following words: Authenticity, truth, equity
- What did you experience or achieve this past year that made you proud?
- What was the most challenging hurdle you faced this year? What did you learn from it?
- Did you take any personal or professional risks this year? What did you learn from them?
- Who did you build a positive relationship with? What drew you to this person?
- How has your perception of medicine evolved after completing fourth-year?





Personal Values



Acceptance
Accomplishment
Accountability
Accuracy
Achievement
Adaptability
Alertness
Altruism
Ambition
Amusement
Assertiveness
Attentive
Awareness
Balance
Beauty
Boldness
Bravery
Brilliance
Calm
Candor

Capable
Careful
Certainty
Challenge
Charity
Cleanliness
Clear
Clever
Comfort
Commitment
Common sense
Communication
Community
Compassion
Competence
Concentration
Confidence
Connection
Consciousness
Consistency
Contentment
Contribution
Control
Conviction
Cooperation
Courage
Courtesy
Creation
Creativity

Credibility
Curiosity
Decisive
Decisiveness
Dedication
Dependability
Determination
Development
Devotion
Dignity
Discipline
Discovery
Drive
Effectiveness
Efficiency
Empathy
Empower
Endurance
Energy
Enjoyment
Enthusiasm
Equality
Ethical
Excellence
Experience
Exploration
Expressive
Fairness
Family
Famous

Fearless
Feelings
Ferocious
Fidelity
Focus
Foresight
Fortitude
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Generosity
Genius
Giving
Goodness
Grace
Gratitude
Greatness
Growth
Happiness
Hard work
Harmony
Health
Honesty
Honor
Hope
Humility
Imagination
Improvement
Independence
Individuality

Innovation	Passion	Self-reliance	Thorough
Inquisitive	Patience	Selfless	Thoughtful
Insightful	Peace	Sensitivity	Timeliness
Inspiring	Performance	Serenity	Tolerance
Integrity	Persistence	Service	Toughness
Intelligence	Playfulness	Sharing	Traditional
Intensity	Poise	Significance	Tranquility
Intuitive	Potential	Silence	Transparency
Irreverent	Power	Simplicity	Trust
Joy	Present	Sincerity	Trustworthy
Justice	Productivity	Skill	Truth
Kindness	Professionalism	Skillfulness	Understanding
Knowledge	Prosperity	Smart	Uniqueness
Lawful	Purpose	Solitude	Unity
Leadership	Quality	Spirit	Valor
Learning	Realistic	Spirituality	Victory
Liberty	Reason	Spontaneous	Vigor
Logic	Recognition	Stability	Vision
Love	Recreation	Status	Vitality
Loyalty	Reflective	Stewardship	Wealth
Mastery	Respect	Strength	Welcoming
Maturity	Responsibility	Structure	Winning
Meaning	Restraint	Success	Wisdom
Moderation	Results-oriented	Support	Wonder
Motivation	Reverence	Surprise	
Openness	Rigor	Sustainability	
Optimism	Risk	Talent	
Order	Satisfaction	Teamwork	
Organization	Security	Temperance	
Originality		Thankful	



*Personal
Values*



MEANINGFUL MOMENT

Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.

DATE: _____ SETTING: _____

OTHERS AROUND: _____



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