



# SELF-REFLECTION GUIDE FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

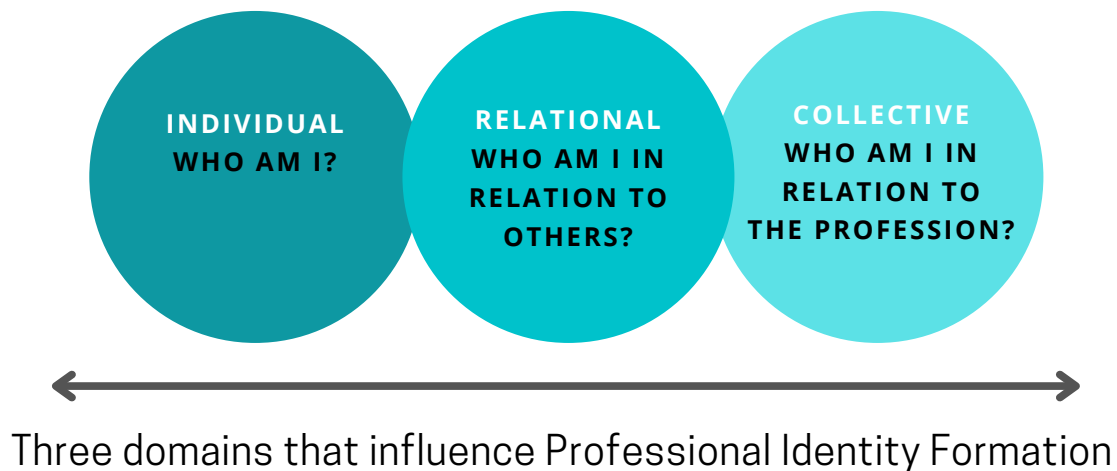
CREATED BY UME STUDENT AFFAIRS

# What is Professional Identity?

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**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.





UT Health  
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# The importance of values

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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. Your mental, emotional, and physical states can suffer when your values are not honored. 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 31-32 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 WELL-  
BEING**

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

**FRAMES EXPERIENCES  
ACROSS DIFFERENT  
PERSPECTIVES AND  
MINDSETS**

# Purpose of Self-Reflection Guide

The goal of this reflection guide is to encourage medical students to become reflective practitioners and develop their professional identity formation. This guide provides a framework to:

- describe, interpret, generalize, and apply learning.
- 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.



# REFLECTION

## THROUGH IMAGES



# 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.





WHITE COAT  
CEREMONY



STUDENT CLINICIAN  
CEREMONY



MATCH DAY



COMMENCEMENT

*Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.*



# Word Play

WHAT DO THESE WORDS MEAN TO YOU?

**Advocacy**

**Empathy**

**Humanities**

**Authenticity**

**Equity**

**Humility**

**Communication**

**Ethics**

**Joy**

**Community**

**Failure**

**Justice**

**Compassion**

**Family**

**Leadership**

**Courage**

**Grief**

**Pain**

**Culture**

**Healing**

**Responsibility**

**Discovery**

**Hope**

**Service**

At the start and end of each academic year, come back to these prompts and reflect on how your answers have evolved throughout your training.

Understanding this evolution will offer insight into your growth and development as a physician.

## *Beginning of Year Prompts*

- What identities currently define you? Which are most important?
- What values are most important to you? How do you live them out in your life?
- How can you give yourself compassion this year?



## *End of Year Prompts*

- 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 did this relationship impact you?
- How has your perception of medicine evolved this year?

# Suggested Reflection Prompts for First-Year Students

First-year reflection focuses on the first phase of PIF, awareness and understanding the self. Prompts tap into your needs, values, and exploration of your emotional landscape.

- What brings you joy? What makes you feel most alive?
- What motivates you to pursue a career in medicine?
- What interests you about a career in medicine?
- What makes you feel grounded and safe?
- What do you expect of yourself in the first year of medical school?
- What is something that amazes you?
- Do you recognize your limitations? What are your boundaries?
- Describe your personal and professional qualities. How will they positively contribute to your success in medical school?



• Do you feel the need to complete all tasks before you practice self-care? Why?

• Do you recognize your limitations? What are your boundaries?

• Do you have healthy habits or coping strategies that allow you to release stress and tension? If so, do you practice them regularly?

• Describe a time you compared yourself to your past or future self.

• In what ways do positive and negative emotions affect you?

• Describe a time you doubted your abilities. What triggered these doubts?

• What is your relationship with failure? What have you learned from past failures?

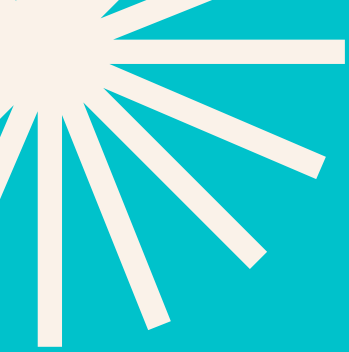
• Reflect on a time you felt stressed, what did you do and not do for yourself. What was the outcome?

• What triggers feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, irritability, inadequacy, and/or comparison?

• How comfortable are you with uncertainty and/or adaptability?

• What do you want your MS4 self to remember?





# Reflection 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.

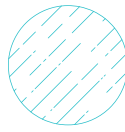






# Reflection for Clinical Experiences

- Reflect on how emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) was a factor in the clinical setting.
- Describe a patient encounter in which access to health care was a concern/barrier. Did this influence your relationship with the patient? Did it influence your course of treatment?
- Describe an encounter where the patient was experiencing non-physical pain (social, emotional, psychological, spiritual pain, etc).
- In observing your preceptor, how did they express elements of respect, listening, empathy, and vulnerability in their communication with patients.
- Did you observe the death of a patient? How did you feel as you observed the death? What did you notice about how others reacted to the death (family, preceptor, nurses, technicians, etc). Did their reaction have an impact on yours?
- If you saw a patient under emergency detention or received emergency pharmacological intervention for agitated or threatening behavior, describe your thoughts and feelings surrounding the encounter.
- How do clinical experiences correlate or differ from what you have learned in the curriculum?
- How do your patients feel about their disease?



Revisit prompts on  
pg. 9 at the start  
and end of 2nd year.

Second-year reflection focuses on the second phase of PIF, gaining awareness and understanding of yourself in relation to others. Prompts center around interactions and relationships.



- What personal and professional qualities make a good colleague?
- What do others expect of you in medical school?
- Describe a time you learned by observing others.
- Reflect on a time you compared yourself to others.
- Do you feel a misalignment of who you are and who you think you should be in medicine?
- Describe a time you were unable to see friends/family because of school obligations. How did this make you feel?
- Reflect on an interaction that made you feel uncomfortable and why.
- Reflect on a time you encouraged or comforted someone; how did it make you feel?
- Reflect on a time when a peer taught you a valuable lesson.
- Reflect on an experience surrounding conflict with others. What triggered it? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

Suggested Reflection Prompts for Second-Year Students

- Describe how another student might remember you based on an incident or memorable encounter you shared.
- Reflect on a time you felt offended by something or someone.
- Reflect on a time when one of your values or beliefs were challenged.
- Has your experience/relationship with your own physician changed since starting medical school?
- Reflect on a time when you may have felt lesser than, or different, from others.
- Are you able to ask for help without feeling guilt or shame?
- Are you able to be vulnerable and/or articulate your thoughts and feelings with others? Why or why not?
- How often do you put other's needs or wants above your own? Why?





# Reflection for Community Service Learning

- What assumptions of your own, perhaps ones you didn't know you had, have you become aware of? How has your experience reinforced or challenged those assumptions or beliefs?
  - What skills of yours, perhaps ones you didn't realize you had, have been an asset in the community?
  - What thoughts do you have about the kind of community member you want to be or community you want to serve?
  - What does a civically-minded physician look like?
  - Why is there a need for the service you provided? What conditions of inequity make the service necessary? What next steps do you think you could take to better understand these underlying inequities? What role do you see you can take in creating more equity?
  - Did any part of the experience make you uncomfortable? Why?
  - How does social conditioning related to your cultural identities (age, class, disabilities, gender, language, race, religious affiliation, sexual identity) influence your teaching, facilitation and reflection styles?
- ### **Benefits of reflection in CSL**

  - Increased understanding of self, others, community, and planet
  - Increased quality of community contributions
  - Capacity to see all partners in the process more holistically
  - Deeper capacity for action that results in social justice and personal transformation



# Reflection for Leadership Roles

- Describe a leadership experience. What was most meaningful?
- What do you expect of yourself? What do others expect of you?
- Do you have a hard time delegating? Why?
- Are you able to recognize when personal emotions are driving your leadership decisions?
- Describe a time you made a decision that wasn't popular.
- How do you react when you feel pressured to make a decision?
- Do you feel you need to change who you are in order to fit in?
- Are you able to ask others for help without feeling guilt or shame?
- What happens when you want to say "no" but don't feel you can?
- Do you compare yourself to other student leaders, both in positive or negative ways?
- Are you able to be vulnerable with your constituents? Why or why not?
- What boundaries, if any, have you placed around your leadership role?
- What barriers, if any, have you encountered when advocating for your constituents? What are the reasons for these barriers? Are those barriers in your control?



# Suggested Reflection Prompts for Third-Year Students

Third-year reflection continues in the second phase of PIF and enters the third phase, gaining awareness and understanding of yourself in relation to the profession. Prompts explore interactions with patients and the health-care team.

- Reflect on a time you encouraged or comforted a patient.
- Write about a patient or colleague who unexpectedly taught you something.
- Whether through observation or personal experience, describe a situation involving unprofessional conduct.
- Reflect on a night on call or night shift. How was this experience different, if at all, from working in the daytime?
- Reflect on a time when you received critical feedback. What did you think and feel?
- Reflect on a time you were put on the spot. What did you think and feel?
- Reflect on a time you felt discouraged.
- Reflect on a time you had difficulty communicating with a patient or their family.



Revisit prompts on  
pg. 9 at the start  
and end of 3rd year.





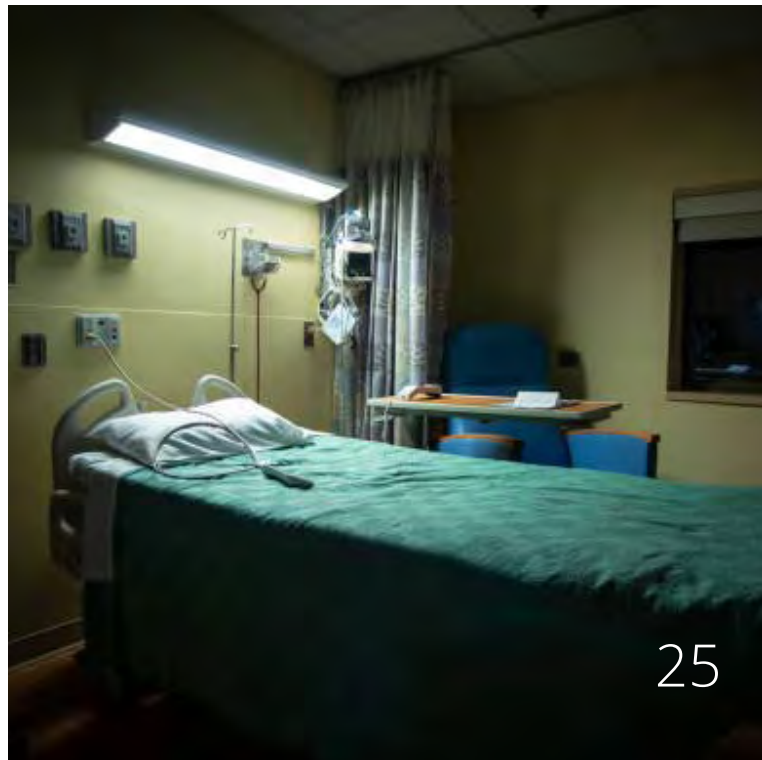
- Reflect on a time when a patient asked you a personal question. How did you respond?
- Reflect on the patient population that interests you. What do you like about this population?
- Reflect on the experience of a patient who may be suffering in a way that is invisible to others.
- Reflect on a time when a patient's cultural or socio-economic orientation altered their course of treatment.
- How do you feel when you see others (colleagues, patients, patient families, etc) going through hardship?
- Reflect on a time when you had to deliver (good or bad) news to a patient or family. What did you think and feel?
- Reflect on a memorable patient encounter. What made it memorable?





# Reflection for each Clerkship

- What did you like/dislike about this clerkship?
- How did this clerkship impact you physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and intellectually?
- What were the circumstances surrounding a time you felt most happy/fulfilled in this clerkship?
- Describe your interactions with the ancillary staff.
- What questions/doubts come to mind when you envision a career in this specialty?
- Has your clinical experience reinforced or challenged previously held assumptions or beliefs?
- What skills, perhaps ones you didn't know you had, have been an asset to your clinical team?
- What skills could you develop or strengthen to be successful in this specialty?





# Reflection if Doubting a Career in Medicine

- What is missing from my training experience?
- What is scaring me about a career in medicine?
- What is holding me back from feeling fulfilled?
- Will I be disappointing someone if I choose a different path?
- How can I make medicine enjoyable?

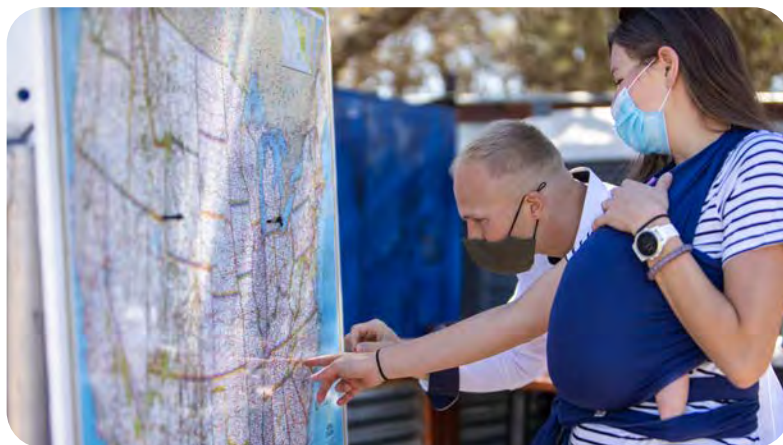


Fourth-year reflection continues in the third phase of PIF, gaining awareness and understanding of yourself in relation to the profession. Prompts not only uncover how your training translates into a career but the ways you want to contribute to the greater good of humanity.

Revisit prompts on  
pg. 9 at the start  
and end of 4th year.




- What do you wish your MS1 self knew?
- What is your personal and professional vision for the future?
- Reflect on how you want to be remembered to your medical school peers.
- How have interactions with other healthcare professionals affected your understanding of your own professional identity?
- Reflect on the strengthening or disintegration of a relationship or team you have been a part of.
- Describe a social issue/cause that has impacted you, and/or is important to you.
- Describe a time when one of your values or beliefs were challenged.
- Reflect on a professional mistake you have made or witnessed.
- Reflect on a time someone trusted you to carry out something important.



- Reflect on 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?
- How does the social and political environment impact individual and population health?
- Describe a colleague you admire and why.
- Reflect on your process for making decisions.
- Are you able to recognize when only your emotions are driving your decisions?
- How will your training inform your professional practice?
- Do you experience FOMO (fear of missing out)? Why?
- Reflect on what is important to you in a residency program.






“Writing is a tool for crystallizing ideas. It exposes gaps in your knowledge and logic. It pushes you to articulate assumptions and consider counterarguments. One of the best paths to sharper thinking is frequent writing”

- Adam Grant



# 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  
Inquisitive  
Insightful  
Inspiring  
Integrity  
Intelligence  
Intensity  
Intuitive  
Irreverent  
Joy  
Justice  
Kindness  
Knowledge  
Lawful  
Leadership  
Learning  
Liberty  
Logic  
Love  
Loyalty  
Mastery  
Maturity  
Meaning  
Moderation  
Motivation  
Openness  
Optimism  
Order  
Organization  
Originality

Passion  
Patience  
Peace  
Performance  
Persistence  
Playfulness  
Poise  
Potential  
Power  
Present  
Productivity  
Professionalism  
Prosperity  
Purpose  
Quality  
Realistic  
Reason  
Recognition  
Recreation  
Reflective  
Respect  
Responsibility  
Restraint  
Results-oriented  
Reverence  
Rigor  
Risk  
Satisfaction  
Security  
Self-reliance  
Selfless

Sensitivity  
Serenity  
Service  
Sharing  
Significance  
Silence  
Simplicity  
Sincerity  
Skill  
Skillfulness  
Smart  
Solitude  
Spirit  
Spirituality  
Spontaneous  
Stability  
Status  
Stewardship  
Strength  
Structure  
Success  
Support  
Surprise  
Sustainability  
Talent  
Teamwork  
Temperance  
Thankful  
Thorough  
Thoughtful

Timeliness  
Tolerance  
Toughness  
Traditional  
Tranquility  
Transparency  
Trust  
Trustworthy  
Truth  
Understanding  
Uniqueness  
Unity  
Valor  
Victory  
Vigor  
Vision  
Vitality  
Wealth  
Welcoming  
Winning  
Wisdom  
Wonder



*Personal  
Values* 32



# MEANINGFUL MOMENT

*Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.*

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*Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# MEANINGFUL MOMENT

*Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# MEANINGFUL MOMENT

*Use this space to vividly capture thoughts around special moments.*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

*We Make Lives Better*







UT Health  
San Antonio

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Long School of Medicine