

# Extracurricular activities

## What extra-curricular activities do you need to be doing?

A common question which arises is based around what activities should you do to help with the application to medical school...

The best way to try and rationalise this is to ask yourself “*What do I need to prove to the medical schools that I am applying to?*” The simple answer is to this is that you will need to demonstrate that you have the **personal attributes** to become a doctor. So what are these attributes – i.e. what makes a good doctor? Most of you will have a list similar to this:

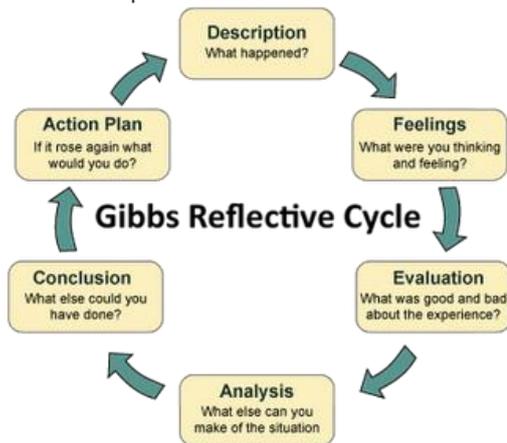
- **Training and Experience**
  - Good knowledge of medicine
  - Confident in clinical abilities and decision making
  - Up to date with recent advancements
  - Able to recognise their limitations
- **Academic**
  - Teaching
  - Research aware and perhaps even research active
  - Regular audits
- **General skills**
  - Good communication skills
  - Team worker and team leader
  - Good organisational skills
  - Handles stress well
  - Honest and Professional

An important point to take away is that you are not expected to demonstrate all of these – *yet*. You are not expected to be a doctor when you leave school! You will learn to develop these attributes as your progress personally and professionally through medical school and hopefully pass through the gauntlet having grown. This personal and professional development will continue to take place in your life as a doctor.

Your academic ability is reflected in your UKCAT scores. However, you will also need to provide some form of evidence to the medical schools in your “personal statement” about some of these attributes. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses and it will be your job to play up strengths as well as you can. You just need to show that you have the right characteristics to become a good doctor in the future – and the best way to do this is to be honest about what you do. I would **not** recommend doing something just for the sake of putting things on your personal statement. I know that many people will inevitably end up doing this but in my opinion it just makes it a lot harder! I guess one argument for doing things “for the personal statement” is that once you get into medical school you can

develop those skills which you need to become a good doctor. Call me traditional, but I don't like that! I did things which I enjoyed doing and talked about it when I applied to medical school – try and do a range of things! The activities you could do will depend on yourself and what you get out of it. Playing the guitar for one individual might allow them to demonstrate their ability to handle stress while for other individuals it might show that they are very good at organising their time around other commitments. You need to make it personal! No one else but you experiences the things you do and if you can coherently express your views in your personal statement, you will do great.

Once again, we know that it is difficult to think deeply about your experiences because of the way that our minds work (see Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*). However, to make things easier you could try a more formal reflection process such as the **Gibbs Reflective cycle** – a cycle that you will come to cherish at medical school:



Source: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/learning/images/gibbs-cycle.png>