

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

OBJECTIVE

Personal statements must be memorable. This is one of your strongest tools in convincing the admissions committee that you are a qualified candidate and possess strong communication skills. It also creates a sense of who you are as an individual, a student, and a future professional. A good personal statement demonstrates that you understand specifically how the schools to which you apply will help prepare you to accomplish your professional and academic goals.

CONTENT

The most acceptable format is to begin with an engaging opening, follow through with an effective theme, and then wrap up with a conclusive ending. All graduate schools require a personal statement, and while the length and topic will vary, they are mainly looking for the same elements. It must be a cohesive, personal narrative with supporting evidence as to what you want to study, why you want to study this academic topic, and why you are applying to their school.

DRAFTING

When writing personal statements, it is best to have your draft edited by a minimum of five people. This will get you many varying opinions on what you should change, strengthen, throw out, or expand upon. Rather than feeling overwhelmed or personally attacked, take advice and criticism with gratitude as it will only help you to enhance your statement. A strong personal statement is never made on the first try; you will end up writing 5-10 different drafts before achieving your finalized product. As you draft, you may need to correct small details, such as grammatical errors, or make big changes to your content or voice. Do not be discouraged or afraid to toss out paragraphs, or perhaps the entire statement, as this a healthy part of the writing process.

WHAT TO INCLUDE:

- Establish what's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story
- Share what details of your life (personal history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) that might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants.
- Specify how you became interested in this field and what has reinforced your conviction that you are well suited for this career
- Discuss the issues/problems in your field of study; show your passion and vision for the future.
- Demonstrate what you know about the problem/topic and its impact on society.
- Describe how you have worked to improve this issue, this could be through volunteer organizations, related work experiences, specific courses taken and related skills or knowledge developed.

GENERAL TIPS

1. Answer all of the questions asked
 - If you are applying to several schools, you may find questions in each application that are somewhat similar, however, do not use the same statement for all applications. It is critical to answer each question being asked. If slightly different answers are needed, you should write separate statements.
2. Tell a story
 - In order to be a memorable candidate, you need to engage the admissions committee. Your statement must be fresh, lively, and different in order to stand out from other applicants. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make an impact. However, remember that this is not a creative piece. It is an academic essay that will require you to support your statements with evidence.
 - Use perfect grammar and avoid the passive voice.
3. Be specific
 - For example, if you state that you would make an excellent doctor, there must be specific reasons to back up this conclusion. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, etc. should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as a cogent conclusion to your story. Do not make broad sweeping statements that you cannot back up.
4. Find an angle
 - If you're like most people, your life story lacks drama, so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle or a "hook" is vital.
 - Write your statement with passion, but do not try to sound more scholarly by incorporating big words to sound impressive.
5. Do some research
 - Research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs as you will be asked to explain why you are applying to it rather than another school. Learn all you can about the graduate program and the professors teaching there. If needed, look more deeply into your field of interest in order to write about it with true insight.