

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

When submitting applications to graduate school, personal statements offer you the opportunity to:

- Demonstrate your unique qualifications to a graduate school admissions committee.
- Illustrate your writing ability, creativity, and career goals.
- Provide committee members with an interesting, insightful, and non-generic personal statements that gives concrete evidence of your competence and motivation.

GETTING STARTED

Before filling out the application, reflect on and make notes about your:

Personal History

- Prior life experiences, events, and achievements relevant to your career choice or application to graduate school.
- Life events and experiences that are distinct or unusual which relate to your professional goals.
- People who have influenced your decision to pursue this field or who have had a significant impact on your values as they relate to this choice.

Academic Life

- Research interests and prior experience
- Academic accomplishments/recognitions
- Influential professors

Work Experience

- Previous jobs, volunteer experience, and/or extracurricular activities that have influenced your career choice or career goals.

Answer these questions:

1. What is special, distinctive, unique, or impressive about you or your life story?
2. How did you learn about the field? What stimulated your interest in this field?
3. What characteristics and skills do you possess that enhance your prospects for success?
4. Have you overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
5. Are there any gaps in your academic record that you want to explain?
6. What are the most compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
7. What are your short and long-term goals?
8. What is the most important thing for an admissions committee to know about you?
9. Why do you want to apply to this program?
10. What are the special features/values of this program that attracted you to it and how do they match your own values, skills, and goals?

Review and Evaluate Suggestions

Evaluating your personal statement is an important part of the writing process. Carefully read over your personal statement. Then ask at least one person, whose opinion you value (e.g., friend, teacher, family member or Career Services staff member) to review and evaluate your personal statement.

FORMATTING TIPS

1. Read the application carefully, follow the directions, and adhere to word or page limits! Most personal statements are 2-3 pages.

2. Be sure to answer the question/topic(s) posed in the application.
3. Choose a font and size that can be easily read by your audience.
4. Write in first person.
5. Proofread for typos and grammatical errors.

DO:

- Aim for depth, not length.
- Write why an event is significant to you and what you learned from it.
- Use readable fonts, conventional spacing, and margins.
- Focus on one or two specific themes and discuss related experiences.
- Concentrate on capturing the readers' interest in the opening paragraph.
- Have specific reasons for applying to each program.
- Mention specific faculty with whom you are interested in working.
- Create a conclusion that refers back to your introduction and ties your points together.
- Articulate short and long-term career goals clearly.
- Comment (briefly) on irregular grade trends, discrepancies on transcripts, or circumstances that affected test scores.
- Mention specific reasons why you are interested in this school and program.

DON'T:

- Write a clichéd introduction or conclusion (e.g., my passion)
- Preach to the reader.
- Repeat information elsewhere in your application to the point of redundancy.
- Discuss money as a motivating factor.
- Exceed word and/or page limits.
- Exaggerate your qualifications or experience.
- Discuss potentially controversial topics (e.g., politics or religion) unless they are tied to the program of study.
- Include extraneous materials (e.g., addendums to applications, videotapes, or audiotapes) unless specifically asked.
- Remind the school of its ranking or tell them "how good they are."

COMMON MISTAKES

1. Sloppiness: Do not have spelling, punctuation, formatting, and grammatical errors. Be sure to leave yourself adequate time to edit and revise your essay. You do not want to send your first draft to the admissions committee.
2. Writing one statement for all schools: Learn about each school's program, including research interests and publications of faculty. Clearly state reasons for pursuing a degree from that school. Be sure to mention faculty members with whom you would like to study when necessary.
3. Boring content: Have a positive tone, vary length and structure of sentences, and avoid clichés. Use active versus passive voice.
4. Sounding like everyone else: Identify your strengths and clearly articulate what sets you apart from other applicants. Do not simply state that this is your passion.
5. Dwelling on crisis: If you discuss a personal crisis, it should relate to the purpose of your essay. Mention how it affected your personal goals, perspective, or academic performance.