



PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR GRAD/PROF SCHOOL

What is a Personal Statement?

A *personal statement* or *statement of purpose* is an essay you may be asked to include with your graduate or professional school application. Your personal statement gives you an opportunity to bring your application to life, so don't be afraid to exhibit your passion for the program you are applying and your future career! Be sure to establish a positive impression throughout your application, as this is an opportunity to establish your unique brand with the admissions committee. To sum things up, the personal statement should describe who you are, why you are applying, your unique qualifications, and what you plan to do in the future.

Begin by Brainstorming

Use the following questions to begin reflecting on the content for your personal statement. Begin jotting down some of your thoughts to help create an outline for your essay and provide a head start for your rough draft!

- Think about a time that defined who you are today.
- What extracurriculars, jobs, and/or volunteer experiences have helped shape you?
- Are you a nontraditional student, five, ten years past undergraduate school? If so, a compelling part of your story may be what led you to pursue this program.
- When did you first think about becoming a _____?
- Were there any unusual or difficult circumstances in your childhood? In your undergraduate years?
- Do you have family members in your chosen field?
- Was there an adult in your life who was especially influential?
- What qualities do you associate with this profession and how do you align with them?
- Who or what has made a significant impact on your life and your decision to pursue this field?
- What is not in your application or resume, but is important in your life?
- Do you have strengths that have not been shown in your other application materials?
- How does this specific program align with your career goals? (Has the research, faculty, specialized programs, or other opportunities impacted your decision to apply?)
- What kind of _____ do you want to be and what impact do you want to have.
- Which ideas, fields of research, or problems especially intrigue you?
- Among the professors you have studied with and in the reading you have done, who has influenced you the most? Why?

Develop a “Hook”

As you reflect on the content of your essay, a persuasive personal statement will incorporate a *hook* in the introduction that tells a brief story about an impactful experience or pivotal moment that led you down the path to the program you are applying. A persuasive personal statement will weave this theme throughout the entire essay.

Write Your Draft

1. **Create an outline.** An outline will help structure your “brainstormed” thoughts into a framework for your draft.
2. **Answer the questions or prompt(s) given in the application.** Following their instructions is vital!
3. **Stress your unique qualities.** Include elements from your personal history, academic life, volunteer experience, and/or work experience.
4. **Write, write, write....** don't edit or worry about the length! Get your thoughts on paper.
5. **Concentrate on one theme** throughout your essay that encompasses your hook and carry this theme throughout your personal statement.

6. **Show them, don't just tell them.** Showcase your qualities and how you think these will make you a better _____. Explain what your application does not show. For example, instead of just stating that you have extensive research experience, briefly discuss specific information about what you researched, methods you used, pertinent equipment, software, etc. Remember, this should be tailored to the program you are applying.
7. **Tell Why, Not What.** Provide just enough information so that your reader can follow what's happening. It's okay to discuss difficult circumstances if they affected your personal and academic development; however, be careful to provide just enough insight while not dwelling on these events.

Take a Break

Put your draft away for at least 2 weeks – don't even look at it!

Revise Your Draft and Submit

When you are satisfied that you are on the right track, do some editing! At this point, it is more constructive to focus on what the essay shouldn't be than what it should be. To help with this, reflect on the following questions:

- Does the essay reflect who I am?
- Do I have transitions between my paragraphs to tie my essay together?
- Have I tied my hook into the body of my essay?
- Have I asked a faculty member, staff member, or trusted individual read your draft and provide feedback?
- Have I set up an appointment with a counselor at the Center for Career and Professional Development to have it reviewed?

What Not To Do

1. Write One General Statement for all Schools

The exception would be if you are required to submit your application through a common application portal. In this case, you would write a general personal statement.

2. Include Boring Content

Have a positive tone, vary the length and sentence structure, and use professional language. Avoid numerical lists, clichés, and chronological histories.

3. Sound Like Everyone Else

In your preliminary self-assessment, identify your strengths and decide what sets you apart.

4. Ignore the Guidelines

Do not ignore the required formatting guidelines put forth by the school you are applying. If there are no specific guidelines, double space your document and consider a 2 page length.

5. Be Shy

Write with confidence about your intellectual development. What events or ideas have most influenced you, and how you have changed intellectually as a result.

6. Write What You Think Someone Else Wants to Read

Don't do this if what you write doesn't truly reflect who you are. Enrolling in a program that isn't truly suited for you will only make you uncomfortable later and decrease your chance of success.

7. Fail to Check Spelling and Grammar Carefully

You are applying to graduate school! Spelling and grammar are essential and reflect your brand.

8. Appear Unrealistic

When discussing goals and plans, make sure that they and the related timetables are feasible.

9. Spin Irrelevant Stories

Make absolutely certain that whatever you decide to reveal about yourself and your life addresses the question asked.