

Personal Statement Guide

What is it and why do I need one?

A personal statement is an extension of your graduate application that gives in-depth detail about who you are and why you chose to apply to the certain program or school. It gives the admissions committee the opportunity to learn more about your goals and how you are different from other applicants.

What do I write about?

Graduate applications often offer a specific question or prompt in which to respond. This will typically regard your interest in pursuing the degree or your long-term goals once you've achieved the degree. However, this isn't always the case. If there are no guidelines for the personal statement, use these questions as a pretend prompt to answer in order to help shape your argument:

- Why did you choose _____ as your career?
- How has your background prepared you for a career as a _____?
- Why are you a good fit for this program?
- Why did you choose to pursue this degree at our university?
- What stimulated your interest in this career field?

How should I prepare to write my personal statement?

Before writing your personal statement, consider these questions below. They will stimulate thoughts about your interests, goals and character. This will create a thesis for your personal statement and a concise argument to follow. Remember, this is a work in progress. You will go through many drafts and different ideas before finally producing an end product.

- What are my short-term and long-term goals?
- How well do my interests match with the program?
- What experiences do I have that relate to the program?
- Have I overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
- What is the most important thing the admissions committee should know about me?

What are some Career Development resources?

Browse the in-office library for these books:

- Donald Asher: Graduate Admissions Essays (3rd & 4th editions)
- Peterson's: How to Write the Perfect Personal Statements (4th edition)
- Mark Alan Stewart: Perfect Personal Statements

Check-out these online resources:

- Peterson's
- Kaplan

What are some tips?

Length

Every personal statement varies depending on the prompt and how you choose to answer. Unless there is a word or page limit, quality usually exceeds quantity. Be sure to include only the most important and relevant information. Your personal statement isn't a summary of all your life's experiences.

Structure

Personal statements should follow a similar structure to any other essay. Include a strong introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Make your argument noticeable and give examples that will help express your points.

Multiple copies

Your personal statement should differ depending on the school you're applying to. You have different reasons for applying to each school. Pull from different experiences that relate to the certain programs and express them in your personal statement.

Reread, edit and seek feedback

It is vital to ensure your personal statement is free of errors. This includes spelling, grammar, etc. Seek feedback from others, such as faculty, alumni and the Career Development staff members.

What are some personal statement "don'ts"?

- Repeat the same information from your résumé
- Overwhelm the reader with too much information
- Exceed page or word limit
- Discuss money as a motivating factor
- Dwell on negativity
- Over-exaggerate your qualifications or experiences
- Discuss potentially controversial topics (politics, religion, etc.)
- Focus heavily on your lack of experience or knowledge regarding the program
- Include over-used clichés (*ex. From a young age...*)

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