

## WRITING THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Your personal statement provides you the opportunity to paint a picture, tell a story about your experience and goals. Some personal statements will be directed - asking you to answer specific questions, while others will be more open stating simply to write a personal statement or statement of interest. In either case it is important that you:

**Understand the question that is being asked.** Bullet point out the different areas addressed: history, experience, goals, how will the education help you in your future, etc.

**Research and understand the school and program.** What is the focus, the mission, the achievements of their program and faculty? What does the school look for in a candidate?

**Evaluate yourself!** Where you have been shapes where you are going! Make sure that your resume is updated and an accurate reflection of your experiences. This will be very helpful!

**Brainstorm and strategize!** What do you want your statement to say about you as a candidate? What impression do you want to give? Speaking with friends, family, your advisor, your career counselor, and other people who you trust and can help formulate your first impression.

### **Interview yourself.**

- Why are you applying to this graduate program?
- What are your goals; how will this graduate program help you achieve your goals?
- What have you done over the past years that have solidified your interest?
- Have you experienced any obstacles/challenges in your life?
- What are some of the things you are most proud of? What drives you to succeed?
- Is there a defining moment/experience that has made you want to pursue this field such as a job, a class, an interaction, or an experience?

### **Shape your personal statement**

Start by outlining it: What are the important experiences you want to share with the admissions committee? What are they looking for and how do you possess those skills? Before you start to write a paragraph, mind map (bullet point out) and briefly describe these reasons/experiences/qualifications on a piece of paper. Think about what qualities you want to shine through and what will make the admissions committee want to learn more about you.

Make sure your personal statement is not a reiteration of your resume. Choose 1-3 experiences you are most proud of, and most related to your goals/program of interest, and speak to who you are as a student/person. Remember your personal statement is there to paint a picture of who you are as candidate and provides you the opportunity to go beyond the numbers, the facts, and your resume to talk about who you are. Tell YOUR story - with focus, clarity and consistency!

Some candidates begin their personal statements with a story and their defining moment which has made them pursue the field. If you don't have one right away, don't get stuck on that. Not all personal statements have to begin with a story or a defining moment! And if you do have one, make sure it sticks, it works, and most of all anyone who reads your statement will understand it!

Be gentle with humor. What you find as humorous or entertaining, others may not see the connection or the humor. So make sure the anecdotes you share are related and relevant to your application and ultimate goals.

**Do NOT research “Successful \_\_\_(insert program name)\_\_\_ Personal Statements” on the Internet!**

This is your story – do not look to others to create, compare, or even contrast your statement. If you are having difficulty, meet with your faculty advisor, your career advisor, or even have conversations with friends. We will help you structure your statement with focus, clarity, and consistency!

**Have your statement reviewed by at least three different people.**

Each person will know you in a different light, will interpret things differently, will pick up on different themes, and have differing opinions and impressions. This is important to make sure that you are getting your point across the way you intended.

**Questions to ask yourself before you write:**

- What details of your life (family, history, people, or events) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants? Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced you are well suited for the field? What insights have you gained?
- If you have worked during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school--and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?

**General Advice**

**Be specific:** Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

**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.

**Concentrate on your opening paragraph:** The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement. Make sure that the themes you introduce in the first paragraph continue through the document!

**Don't include some subjects:** There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects (for example, controversial religious or political issues).

**Do some research:** If a school wants to know why you are applying to it rather than another school, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other universities or programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention.

**Write well and correctly:** Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits but don't let word limits constrain you on a first draft! Write freely and then edit.

**Avoid clichés:** A medical school applicant who writes that he is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated or tired statements.