

Guide to Writing a Personal Statement

A personal statement, also known as a statement of purpose, is often a part of the graduate school application. While your transcript and GPA provide the admissions committee with an overview of your academic strengths, a personal statement offers the committee a glimpse of who you are. Because a personal statement is primarily the only time you are able to attach an individual element to your application, you want to draft and write an excellent document.

Before You Begin

Before you start to write your personal statement, determine what the admissions committee is requesting. Can you choose your own topic or, are you required to answer specific questions? The guidelines provided in the application will determine your response.

Also, take time to think about and jot down answers to the following questions:

- What type of experiences have you had?
- What are your career goals (both short and long term)?
- What achievements/successes have you had?
- What makes you a good candidate for their program?
- When did you become interested in the field and what have you learned?
- What do you want the admissions committee to know about you?
- What, if any, obstacles have you had to overcome?
- Why are you applying to “X” school?
- Why are you interested in the particular field?
- What’s unique about you?
- What characteristics do you possess that will benefit you in the field?
- Why do you want to pursue an advanced degree in this particular field?

The answers to the above questions will provide you with information to include in your statement. Also, before beginning to write, outline your statement. One big mistake when writing a personal statement is being too broad and not succinct. An outline will help you stay on task.

Things to Consider as You Write

Due to the number of applications received and reviewed, you will want to make sure that your personal statement does not take a forgettable, generic approach. Instead, incorporate some of your uniqueness into the document. If you have a hard time with this, consider telling a story or incorporating a “hook” to catch the reader’s attention in the first paragraph.

While you want to thoroughly answer the questions and write a statement that sets you apart from other applicants, you want to be sure that you do all of this within the established guidelines. If page or word limits are provided, be sure to adhere to them. Furthermore, use a font and size that is easy to read (ex. Times New Roman 12 font, Arial 12 font).

Things to Avoid When Writing a Personal Statement

Careless mistakes

Make sure to double and triple check your personal statement for typos, grammatical mistakes, punctuation errors, etc.

Duplication

Each school should receive a personal statement tailored to them. For help, review the school and the program for ideas and refer to application instructions for guidance.

Plain

Don't be boring. Instead, write a personal statement that the admissions committee is going to remember. Keep in mind that you are competing against numerous applicants. How can you set yourself apart?

Too much information

While you do want to provide the committee with some insight into who you are, you do not need to divulge every detail. Make sure all information relates directly to the purpose of your statement.

Personal Statements Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Incorporate stories and humor as appropriate
- Focus your statement on one to two topics
- Answer all questions as best as possible
- Express yourself concisely
- Provide enough detail
- Use concrete examples to supplement your information
- Conclude your statement with a paragraph that clearly wraps everything up
- Expect to revise your essay multiple times
- Have someone proofread your statement

Don't

- Be boring or cliché
- Submit the same essay to multiple schools
- Duplicate information
- Go beyond word/page limitations
- Introduce or discuss controversial topics
- Make things up or embellish
- Submit a statement with typos, grammatical errors or spelling mistakes
- Be vague

Need Help?

Use the attached Personal Statement Checklist to double-check the writing and content of your statement.

To have your personal statement reviewed, schedule an appointment with a career counselor or stop-in during walk-in hours.

References

Abraham, L. (2008). *Writing Your Statement of Purpose for Grad School*. Retrieved May 6, 2008 from: <http://www.accepted.com/grad/personalstatement.aspx>.

Brattole, M. (2008). *Writing a personal statement*. Florida State University's Career Center. Retrieved May 6, 2008 from: <http://www.career.fsu.edu/education/graduate/personal-statement-guide.html>.

Stelzer, R. J. (2002). *How to write a winning personal statement for graduate and professional school: 3rd edition*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Peterson's.

Personal Statement Checklist

ITEM	YES / NO / NA	COMMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did I read all of the directions and follow them completely? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the statement well written and free of typos and grammatical errors? • Did I have someone else proofread my statement? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I catch the reader's attention in the beginning? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the statement answer or address questions asked in the application? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was irrelevant material omitted? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the statement an accurate reflection of me and my qualifications? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is my statement interesting? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my statement present a positive attitude? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the reader gain any insight about me? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I feel as if the statement has the potential to distinguish me from other applicants? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did I provide enough detail or is there missing information? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my conclusion tie everything together? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did I tailor my personal statement to each individual school and program? 		