



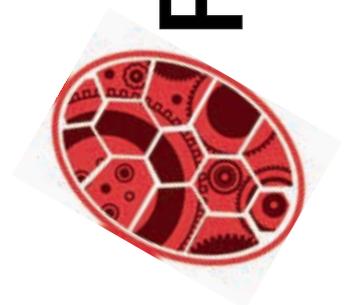
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Personal Statements



WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

Whether you are applying for graduate school or a summer research experience, you will probably have to write one or more essays, called a statement of purpose or personal statement. This essay is different from the one you wrote to apply to college as an undergraduate.

An effective personal statement:

- demonstrates knowledge of your field of study and the specific program to which you are applying
- illustrates your potential to conduct research and contribute to the field
- explains *HOW* and *WHY* the events you describe have shaped your attitude, focus, and intellectual strengths
- allows the readers to get a feel for you as a person, as a student and researcher
- is a structured *description of selected achievements*, not a chronological *list* of your accomplishments or an autobiography

BEFORE YOU START WRITING

Prompts for personal statements can be general, essentially asking you to make the case for why you should be admitted to the program. Some applications will require you to answer a series of short essay questions. You should be prepared to address some of the questions below.

ASK YOURSELF...

- What makes you different, unique or impressive compared to your classmates?
- What kinds of influences have shaped who you are (academic, personal)?
- How have life (non-academic) experiences influenced your choice? Where are you coming from? Why are you coming here? Where are you going? Are there any adversities that have shaped your self-image, career, or education?
- How did you become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and/or reinforced your conviction that you are well-suited for this field?
- How have you learned about this specific field (through classes, reading, seminars, work or other experiences)?
- If you have worked during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills) and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- Are there any gaps/discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre GRE scores)? Note particular challenges (ex. needed to work late to support family while in school).
- What personal characteristics (integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field or profession?
- What skills (leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess and what kinds of concrete proof can you provide?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate and more successful and effective in the field or profession than other applicants – what sets you apart?
- What are the most compelling reasons they should consider you?
- What challenges have you overcome throughout your academic career?
- What path do you envision your career taking (short- and long-term)?

BRAINSTORMING

Use this worksheet to list any experiences that could be relevant to your essay.

Personal History	Academic Life
Research Experience	Work/Volunteer

STRUCTURING YOUR STATEMENT

After you brainstorm, creating an outline will help you form a coherent, organized essay. This is a suggested format to help you get started.

- I. Introduction/Personal History
 - a. Original and engaging start. (Remember, no clichés!)
 - b. Introduce a central theme that will guide the reader through the essay. This might be in the form of a short anecdote.
 - c. Strong thesis statement about your interest in and qualifications for the program
- II. Academic Accomplishments
 - a. Avoid restating your resume; instead tie one or two relevant events or experiences to skills and qualities you possess.
- III. Research Experience
 - a. What did you learn from performing research that you can take with you as you pursue graduate studies?
 - b. Has this experience had any impact on your interests and goals?
 - c. Highlight any accomplishments or difficulties that you overcame.
- IV. Additional Information
 - a. How has a particular work, volunteer or extracurricular experience shaped you as a person? What skills did you gain?
 - b. Explain any circumstances that had an effect on your academic performance.
- V. Goals and Future plans
 - a. Demonstrate your interest in the field.
 - b. Discuss specific and realistic goals that are relevant to the program you are applying for.
 - c. How will this institution/program will be a good fit for you and vice versa.
- VI. Closing
 - a. Briefly summarize your past accomplishments, who you are now, and what you hope to accomplish.
 - b. Relate this section back to the opening paragraph; complete the story for the reader.
 - c. Finish with a strong last sentence that shows leaves a lasting impression of you to the reader.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

- Take the reader on a journey through your academic and professional life.
- Do your best to relate what you know about the field, using relevant examples.
- Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with other professionals, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or other sources about the career you want and why you believe you are suited to it.
- What you choose to include is a demonstration of your judgment; give careful consideration to your topics.
- Focus more on your own personal accomplishments and less on what you aspire to achieve.

PERSONAL STATEMENT DO'S AND DON'TS

DO	DON'T
✓ Demonstrate knowledge of program/ university/ faculty, reasons for applying to this particular program	✗ Copy and paste from a sample or template, or from previous personal statements
✓ Mention if you have visited the campus or contacted faculty to discuss their research	✗ Exaggerate your accomplishments (This is considered lying.)
✓ Address the questions in the prompt with specific examples from your experience	✗ Include clichés or obvious statements like, "I am a lifelong learner"
✓ Use clear, concise, professional language	✗ Throw in jargon to sound smarter (you won't)
✓ Describe how you've overcome adversity using positive tone	✗ Dwell on the negative aspect of your experience, or lack of experience
✓ Reference industry and academic sources in your chosen field	✗ Base your essay just on your individual opinion/ experience
✓ Proofread your essay and have others read and comment on your draft	✗ Submit an essay with errors in grammar, spelling or punctuation
✓ Let your personality show in your writing	✗ Try to incorporate humor, or address potentially controversial/ inappropriate topics

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizing Your Personal Statement: An Outline to Get you Started by Merry J. Sleight, PhD
<https://cms.bsu.edu/-/media/WWW/DepartmentalContent/Psychology/Docs/PersonalStatement.pdf>

Writing the Personal Statement, Purdue Owl
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

Examples of Personal Statements, Getting-in.com
http://www.getting-in.com/personal_statement_taxonomy/personal-statement-samples/

University of Maryland Writing Center
<http://www.english.umd.edu/academics/writingcenter>

If you would like a Co-op & Career Services advisor to proofread your essay for content and form, please:

- Send it to us by email at careerengr@umd.edu **at least 5 business days before the deadline**
- In your email, include the prompt, and list 2-3 weekdays and times that you can be available to discuss edits
- Outside of peak recruiting seasons (September-October or February-March), we will usually respond within 2 business days