Writing Your Personal Statement

What is a Personal Statement and Why is it Important?

Graduate and professional schools make their decisions to admit applicants based on test scores, undergraduate academic performance, co-curricular activities, recommendation letters, an interview, and a written essay. Many schools will also ask for a personal statement. The personal statement gives you the chance to write about yourself.

You are competing with other applicants who have similar test scores and grades. The personal statement can be the factor differentiating you from the other candidates; it gives the admissions committee a chance to see you as a person. A good essay might be the deciding factor in an admission decision and an unconvincing or unremarkable essay can adversely affect your chances of admission.

The more you can engage your reader with a personal story of why your chosen field is important to your long-range career goals, and purpose for pursuing further study in that field, the more compelling your statement will be. In writing your essay, it is important to keep two goals in mind: 1. To persuade the admission committee or recruiter to admit you to their program; and 2. That you are far more than a GPA or test score. You are a real person who would be an asset to the school or organization.

The Three-Step Process to Writing a Personal Statement:

1. **Brainstorming**
   In this step, you engage in self-reflection, research and the development of ideas for your personal statement. As you begin writing, make sure to review specific prompts and questions from each school. Allow yourself plenty of time to perform this step, and consider the following questions:
   - What events, personal experiences, or difficult situations shaped my character?
   - What experiences were most influential in choosing my career path?
   - What skills, knowledge, and experiences distinguish me from other candidates?
   - What do I find meaningful or purposeful (passion)?
   - What are my goals or hopes for my future career?
   - What are my hobbies?

2. **Selecting Your Personal Statement Topic**
   As you begin step two, ask yourself: “what impression do I hope to create through my statement?” Select a topic allowing you to synthesize the information from step one into a well-written document leaving a positive and memorable impression. Consider some of the following tips as you make your selection:
   - Do not use quotes, as they are not original.
   - Avoid using gimmicks, but select a topic that grabs the readers’ attention in the first paragraph.
   - Provide vivid supporting experiences that illustrate your topic.
   - Avoid repeating information that can be found elsewhere in your application (such as GPA).
   - Seek feedback from your professors, advisors, and career counselor about the topic.

3. **Tips for Writing Your Personal Statement**
   As you write your statement, keep in mind your goal is to convince admissions you are the candidate they want and that you will be successful in their program.
• Start by creating an outline and journaling the first draft of your statement.
• Be original - make it interesting.
• Be yourself - readers want to learn about who you are as a person.
• Less is more - do not try to impress the readers with your vocabulary and “big words”.
• Use imagery and clear vivid prose - describe your life experiences using graphic images.
• Determine if there is a theme to your statement - a common thread.
• Spend the most time on your introduction - it is essential that you grab the reader’s attention immediately. Often experts recommend that you write the introduction after you have the body of the essay written.
  o Do not summarize in your introduction - the reader may not continue reading.
  o Create curiosity or intrigue in the reader’s mind by raising questions.
  o If there is a theme to your statement, introduce your theme at the beginning.
• Relate all paragraphs in the body of the essay to the introduction; or to your theme.
• Make smooth transitions to preserve the flow of your essay.
• Conclusions are crucial; this is the last chance to convince the reader of your qualifications. Do not use phrases such as: “in conclusion” or “in summary”. Consider the following suggestions:
  o Link your conclusion to the introduction to create a sense of balance by restating the introduction phrases.
  o Focus on your career goals- where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
  o Discuss the broader implications of your discussion.
  o Redefine a term previously used in the body essay.
  o It may be appropriate to leave the reader with unanswered questions or ambiguity rather than to try to answer large philosophical questions.

It should be clear why you want to enter the field, but avoid writing about why you want to be a doctor, lawyer, and so on, unless specifically asked. In addition, do not waste space telling the admissions committee what the profession is like. Similarly, do not write your life story. Avoid using your statement to provide a laundry list of your accomplishments; this should be found elsewhere in your application. In addition to the content of your personal statement, presentation is also important. Follow writing guidelines and use a font size that is easy to read.

**Determine Your Approach and Style of the Statement**

These are something the statement should do:

• It should be objective, yet self-refectory. Write directly and in a straightforward manner describing your experience and what it means to you. Do not use “academese”. This is not a research paper for a professor.
• It should form conclusions explaining the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and the field, your future goals, and career plans. Draw your conclusions from the evidence your life provides.
• It should be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances, or draw your conclusions as the result of individual experience. It should be an example of careful persuasive writing. Career counselors can help you by reviewing your draft statement.
• It should get to the point early on and catch the attention of the reader.
• It often needs to me limited in length, no more than two pages or less. In some instances it may be longer, depending on the school’s instructions.