

WRITING AN IMPRESSIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

A personal statement, or statement of purpose, is a brief and focused essay about your career or research goals that is part of the application package for a graduate or professional school. A personal statement is your opportunity to sell yourself to the program's admission committee as a strong prospect by elaborating on your unique qualifications. The personal statement should illustrate your ability to succeed in the program, career goals, and writing ability.

TYPES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

- The **general**, comprehensive personal statement allows you maximum freedom in terms of what you write and is the type of statement often prepared for standard medical or law school application forms. Example: Tell us why you want to be a lawyer.
- Often, business and graduate school applications ask **specific** questions, and your statement should respond specifically to the question being asked. Some business school applications favor multiple essays, typically asking for responses to three or more questions. Example: In a maximum of 600 words, write a personal statement discussing your interests, life experiences, goals and social commitment.

WHAT ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES WANT TO SEE

- Interesting, insightful, and non-generic personal statements
- **HOW** the essay provides evidence of your achievements that is not reflected in other parts of your application
- **HOW** and **WHY** the events that you describe have shaped your attitude, focus, and, most of all, your intellectual vitality

BEFORE YOU WRITE

1. Reflect on and make notes about your:

Personal History

- Prior life experiences, events, and achievements relevant to your career choice or application to graduate school
- People who have influenced your decision to pursue this field or who have had a significant impact on your values as they relate to this choice

Academic Life

- Academic accomplishments and recognitions
- Research interests and prior experience
- Professors who have influenced you academically

Experience

- Previous jobs, volunteer experience, social and professional activities that have influenced your career choice or career goals

2. Ask Yourself These Questions:

- Why am I interested in this field and how did I become interested?
- Do I have an interesting story—overcoming hardships, working through obstacles, gaining experiences—to tell about my life, experiences, academics, talents that will appeal to the search committee or support my goals?
- What are my strengths, how have I used them thus far, and how will I use them to ensure my prospects for success?
- Is there anything in my application that could be seen as a weakness, e.g., low GPA, low test score, lack of experience, that I want to explain?
- What are my short- and long-term goals?
- What is the most important thing for an admissions committee to know about me?
- What and how will I contribute to the program?

PERSONAL STATEMENT DO'S AND DON'TS

Do

- Give yourself a lot of time to compose your statement. You will likely have many rewrites, so this process can take weeks.
- Have a clear idea of what you want to convey. Give your statement a theme, a thesis.
- Tell a story.
- Tailor your personal statement to each individual program to which you are applying.
- Answer the question or topic(s) posed in the application.
- Let your personality out. This is your personal statement; open up, get personal.
- Concentrate on capturing the reader's interest in the opening paragraph.
- Focus on depth of answers, as opposed to breadth.
- Write about aspects of yourself that readers cannot get from other parts of your application.
- Offer specific, meaningful stories and experiences.
- Express yourself clearly and concisely; use direct, straightforward language.
- Focus on your strengths, and not your weaknesses.
- Be positive, upbeat, and confident.
- Create a conclusion that refers back to your introduction and ties your points together.

Don't

- Preach to the reader.
- Exaggerate your qualifications or experience.
- Use gimmicks.
- Discuss potentially controversial topics (e.g., politics or religion).
- Exceed word or page limits.
- Include extraneous material.
- Use clichés.
- Write what you think the committee wants to hear, instead of what is real to you.
- Relate personal details that are not relevant to your ability to be a successful graduate student.

AFTER YOU WRITE

- Revise. Revise. Revise.
- Proofread. Proofread. Proofread.
- Have others critique your statement.

MAKE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT WORK FOR YOU IN ANOTHER WAY.

You can give your personal statement to your recommenders. Sharing your statement with your recommenders shows them how you plan to position yourself in the application process. If they are aware of what personal characteristics you want to emphasize, they can address those traits in their recommendation letters, thus sending an even more focused and powerful message about you to the admissions committee.

RESOURCES AT WIDENER

- Career counselors at the Career Design and Development office
- Staff members at the Writing Center
- Professors

RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

- *Purdue OWL: Writing the Personal Statement*, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>
- *The Statement of Purpose*, www.statementofpurpose.com
- *University of CA, Berkeley: The Personal Statement*, www.students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/index.htm