



Personal Statements

A personal statement is the portion of a graduate school application in which the applicant gets the opportunity to give voice to the application. This writing shows the university who the applicant is as a person, what achievements they've made, and why they'd be a valuable asset to the program. Some schools may ask applicants for a single statement, while others might ask several specific questions such as how they might contribute to the culture of the campus or program, or tell about a time that they overcame an obstacle. The following suggestions are meant to help writers navigate the unique rhetorical situations personal statements create.

Before You Write

- Review the prompt and instructions of the personal statement because different programs and schools have different expectations.
- Consider the following:
 - Significant life events
 - Personal goals
 - Unique experiences, circumstances, or skillsets
 - Relevant personal anecdotes
- Websites, brochures, and mission statements are a good place to start looking for how you orient your personal statement.
- Utilize friends, family, and colleagues for help in brainstorming ideas or getting a fresh perspective on the personal statement.

Content

- Reflect on the uniqueness of the individual situation.
- Don't be a robot: Use writing to exhibit personality.
- The personal statement is not a narrative of the resume. The remainder of the application is qualifications based, while a personal statement is personality based.
- Tell a story.
- Be creative. Opening sentences should get readers interested and language should engage readers with the applicant's unique characteristics and personal experience that might not be visible in more standardized application materials.
- If asked to recount background or experience, make sure to discuss it in relation to personal characteristics and qualifications. How did experience shape your ideas, your personality, and your goals.

Style and Format

- Always proofread carefully to avoid typos.
- While it might be tempting to write a “one size fits all” personal statement,” it is better to tailor each statement to the specific school or program.
- Make sure to send the right personal statement to the right school (if applying to multiple schools)
- Because personal statements are often short, it is not completely necessary to include an introduction and conclusion in the personal statement. Avoid saying things like “Hi, my name is...” or “Thank you for reading”.
- Remember the audience. Avoid using unconventional writing styles, which may come across as inappropriate.
 - Use of the third person.
 - Being too familiar.
 - Writing in an alternative style, such as a a poem or song. (Performing arts schools may differ and ask for applications submitted in audio or visual format).
- Do not veer too far from the norm with font. Keep it around size 11 or 12, and use a standard font. (Calibri, Cambria, Times New Roman, Arial).
- Page and word limits are present for a reason, so be sure to follow them. Excess material is likely to go unread. If there aren’t strict guidelines for this from the school, keep the format simple and traditional to sustain readability.
- Seek feedback from at least two outside parties before submitting a personal statement. A good balance is a family member who can inform authenticity and stranger who can be objective.
- While it’s perfectly acceptable to have someone edit the essay for grammar and style, never allow someone to rewrite the paper. These documents are meant to be unique to the writer.