



Writing personal statements and statements of interest

— a brainstorming handout to go with the Career Education workshop given by Kate Dailinger, 2018

Given what you've discovered through your research and reflection about the opportunity for which you're applying, what are the main points you want your application to convey? What do you want readers to take away from your application, to help them see why you're a good fit for their program—and it's a good fit for you?

How to figure out your main points?

Before I start writing, I like to start with a blank piece of paper and brainstorm to make a kind of idea map. Use a pen, a computer, or even record your ideas as you talk through them—whatever works for you! Looking at the questions below, write down/talk through any idea you think of without filtering:

- Why is this a good fit? What are you excited about? What do you hope to learn from this experience? What might you hope to contribute?
- What are the relevant things in your education/training/experience which give you a good foundation for what you're proposing to do? (classes, research, internships, civic engagement, extracurriculars, personal background, etc.)
- What are the relevant skills you have? Research skills, languages (human or computer), etc. (It doesn't have to be fancy: if people skills are relevant to what you're proposing to do and you honed your skills waiting tables to help pay for college, that counts!)
- How does what you're applying to do align with your interests? Where did these interests come from and what has shaped them? Why should the *reader* (the audience for the particular application you're writing) be interested in this, too—why should they care/want to see you do this? (Draw them in, engage them, make them excited about it, too.)
- How does what you're applying to do fit into your future aims and aspirations? If the committee gave you this opportunity where might you run with it?



Tip: Questions like “why should we choose you?” aren’t asking you to blow your own horn, they’re asking you to make an exciting case for what you’re hoping to do and how this proposal would fit into that/help you do that better, to show what a good return on investment you’d be (because you’re a good fit, because the work you want to do in the world matters and this would help you to do it, and that would meet the mission of the program, etc.).

Okay, now what?

- Start to connect related ideas: what fits with what? (Maybe draw lines to connect related ideas.)
- What’s more or less relevant to the application at hand? (Try circling or underlining important ideas.)
- Which pieces of the application will best make the points you’re hoping to convey? Some things will be in your transcripts, resume/cv [**tip:** a personal statement should not read like a narrative resume, especially if they already have a resume...], research proposal, sample of written work, short-answer questions on an application, or what-have-you. Note that some things will be better said by others, and more persuasively: your *recommenders* will blow your horn, provide expert opinion on your background, skills, abilities, promise for the future, etc. (Perhaps try color coding to show which ideas might come across in which pieces of your application.)

Having figured out what’s most important and cleared the ground by sorting out what will be said by other pieces of the application:

- What can best be said by you, in your personal statement/statement of purpose?
- What part of the story does your statement need to tell?
- What are the connecting theme(s) or through line of your application and how might you get that across?

Now you’re ready to start writing, and finding out the best way to convey what you want to convey, as persuasively as possible, in a way that feels true to you. There is no formula for doing this, and it takes longer than you might think.

Take your time

Give yourself time to try multiple drafts and to seek feedback and advice, from Career Education staff, professors and other mentors and writers of references, writing tutors, friends—your own personal Board of Advisors. Leave time to walk away and come back with fresh eyes, to proofread, and to get everything in safely before the deadline (even if your computer crashes or other unexpected glitches should occur).

Find more resources at <https://www.wellesley.edu/careereducation>, and know we’re here to help. You can do this, and it’s valuable experience. Writing applications *does* get easier with practice... (Really!)

Best of luck!