

Writing Personal Statements



What is a personal statement? What should it do?

A personal statement is a short essay most graduate or professional schools require with your application that explains why you want to be admitted into that program, how your experience makes you a qualified candidate, and how you hope the program would contribute to your life professionally and academically.

Your personal statement is your chance to convince the school you are applying to that you will be an asset to its program. Your transcripts, resume/CV, letters of recommendation and test scores will also speak to your qualifications, but your personal statement will give the committee reading your materials a sense of you as someone who is motivated, experienced, unique, and excited to achieve goals and to keep learning. In other words, it gives you the chance to elaborate on and describe how you stand out above the other applicants. What do you have to offer that they don't have?

Some programs you apply to might simply ask you to "write a personal statement," or something a bit more detailed, like "write a personal statement about your experience, why you would be an asset to the program, and how the program will help you achieve your professional goals." Others might be more detailed still, asking you to respond to several questions in the form of several different essays. Whatever the prompt is, make sure you read it thoroughly several times so you know what you need to do.

How can you get started on your personal statement?

- Look over your resume or CV. What experiences stick out to you as ones worth explaining to the committee further? Which ones are unique to you that would make you stand out as a candidate? Do some free writing about these to get your ideas going.
- Take a close look at the website for the program you are applying to. Do they give any extra clues as to what they would be looking for in their graduate students? What are their current graduate students studying? What about their faculty?

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How can you get started (cont.)?

- Do some free writing about what your career or academic goals are.
- Don't worry about starting at what you think would be the beginning of your essay. Write what comes to you first!

What are some common features of a personal statement?

Here are some common moves writers make in personal statements:

- Try starting your statement with a brief anecdote from your experience (something that inspired you to pursue your field, a significant event that occurred during your experience working or studying in your field, an obstacle you have overcome to get you to this field etc.).
- If you are applying to a **lot** of programs, try to keep your discussion of the specific program you are applying to, to one paragraph so you can easily change it for each program.
- Some writers choose to order their paragraphs chronologically, but you don't *have* to do this. Try organizing your paragraphs, instead, by theme.

Final tips

- Ask professors, colleagues, friends, family members, or anyone else you feel would be helpful to read your statement and give you feedback. Our tutors at the U of L Writing Center are great at that!
- Read your statement out loud after you have written a draft of it so you can catch grammatical errors, or try reading it backwards.
- Make sure your opening paragraph is interesting enough to grab the reader's attention. Many committees are overwhelmed with submissions, so the more you can do to make them want to keep reading, the better!
- Try to stay away from clichés. Reading, for example, that a candidate wants to go to a Master's in Education program because he or she is a "good teacher" does not mean much to a committee, as any candidate could claim this. Try to be more specific and explain what being a good teacher would mean to *you*.