

Personal Statement (Graduate)



What is a personal statement? What should it do?

A personal statement is a short essay that explains why you want to be admitted into a graduate or professional 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. Other application materials speak to your qualifications objectively; your personal statement will give the committee reading your materials a sense of you personally. Your statement allows you to offer evidence that you are 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 might simply ask you to "write a personal statement," while others might give more detailed prompts. If you are applying to multiple institutions, this may mean creating multiple statements, or finding a way to synthesize the prompts into a guiding question.

How can you get started on your personal statement?

- Research your program(s) of interest. Seek out information such as mission statements and program goals. How do your interests or goals align with the program?
- Review your resume/CV. What experiences or skills are listed there that you would like to elaborate on? What aspects of your experiences and goals are not represented on your resume or CV? Brainstorm a list and use that as a starting point.
- Consider what skills, background, or dispositions are expected in your field. Do you have any experiences or narratives that could show evidence of these features?
- Recall crucial experiences you've had in, or relating to your field. How did these moments shape you? How have they led you to apply to this field?

Personal Statement

Strategies for writing a personal statement

- *Make a strong case for yourself:* Your statement should be constructed on the central argument that you are a good fit for the program, and the program is a good fit for you. Your experiences or narrative should connect to what is expected of a scholar or participant in your program. Likewise, you should express how your imagine your program assist you in achieving your goals.
- *Get personal:* Your personal statement is intended to supplement a CV or resume. It should express things about you that your CV or resume did not cover, or did not fully show. It's likely that you will be contending with peers with similar skills and knowledge. By looking closely at your personal experience, you offer a committee a chance to get to truly know you.
- *Go in-depth:* When elaborating on your experiences, make sure that you show, not just tell. For instance, if you learned something about a profession in a moment, walk your reader through the process of learning or understanding that concept. Likewise, if you're describing the development of a disposition, you should express in detail how you came to this feeling or understanding.
- *Address the institution:* Describe why this specific program is a good fit for you. You might indicate an interest in particular coursework, experiences or even note faculty research that resonates with you. If you are applying to multiple schools, you may consider limiting this to a single paragraph that you adjust for each program.

Tips

- You can't include every experience or skills in your personal statement. It is better to have a clear theme, with detailed examples, than to have a statement that feels overloaded and unfocused.
- Don't feel you have to organize your statement chronologically. You can also consider grouping ideas by theme or goal.
- Consider a vivid scene or image to open your statement. What can grab the committee's attention?
- If you have peers who have been admitted to a program in your field, ask to look at their personal statements. This will give you an idea of what makes for a successful personal statement.
- Reach out to professors in your field for ideas and feedback. They have gone through the graduate school admissions process themselves, and may have admission's committee experience, as well.