GRADUATE SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT

What is a Personal Statement?
• Application essay in response to a questions or questions

Purpose:
• Differentiates middle range applicants
• Qualitative admissions factor
• Supplements and enriches application
• Shows how well applicant’s interests match program
• Assesses writing ability

Used to determine if applicant:
• Is ready for rigors of graduates school
• Will succeed in program
• Will have success after the program

Graduate schools are looking for:
• Academic ability (GPA, GRE, letters of recommendation)
• Experience in and passion for chosen area of study (essays, resume, letters of recommendation)
• Character (Essay, interview)

Important questions to answer within graduate school applications:
• Why do you want to go to graduate school?
• Why this school rather than others?
• Why is now the right time?

What they want to know/typical prompts:
• Why are you interested in pursuing this field of study?
• What is your professional background or preparation?
• How do you want to apply your studies in the future (career goals)?
• Why is our program the best fit?
• Why is now the right time to go to graduate school?
The Do’s and Don’ts of the Personal Statement

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<th>PERSONAL STATEMENT MUSTS</th>
<th>AVOID THESE AREAS</th>
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<td>• Provide evidence (stories) that illustrate who you are, how you developed, and what matters to you.</td>
<td>• Don’t recycle your resume or transcript</td>
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<td>• Discuss Intellectual and career Goals</td>
<td>• Don’t plea for help</td>
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<td>• Demonstrate a fit with the program</td>
<td>• Don’t think that being qualified with qualify you</td>
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<td>• Allow schools to infer your traits and values</td>
<td>• Don’t include a laundry list of personal traits</td>
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<td>• Include personal insight and rationale for your motivation</td>
<td>• Don’t speak negatively of anyone or anything</td>
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<td>• Draw on all your experiences</td>
<td>• Don’t forget relevant academic, professional, or volunteer experiences</td>
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<td>• Connect your work and experiences</td>
<td>• Don’t assume your experience will speak for itself</td>
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<td>• Show how you are unique and what you’ll bring to the program</td>
<td>• Don’t make assumptions about how you’re viewed</td>
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<td>• Make it a sincere sales pitch</td>
<td>• Don’t pontificate, use clichés, wallow in emotion, or get needlessly fancy</td>
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<td>• Follow directions</td>
<td>• Don’t provide an easy reason for rejection</td>
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Most Common Mistakes

• Not demonstrating personality, character, or motivation
• Not demonstrating a fit with the specific program (care, research, interest)
• Writing what applicant thinks the admissions officers “want” to hear
• Spelling, grammatical issues, errors (wrong school name!)
Steps to Writing a Personal Statement

1. **Brainstorm & develop stories**
   a. What have you learned or done
   b. Academic experience
   c. Career experience
   d. Extracurricular experiences
   e. Achieved goals and accomplishments
   f. Significant life experiences and moments that signaled change/growth
   g. Failure or setbacks you learned from or overcame
   h. Intellectual or career goals and how a graduate degree fits
   i. Key attributes and experiences you want to convey
   j. How do you want to be remembered?
   k. What will you contribute to the program?

2. **Plan and outline**
   a. Create brief outline
   b. Choose best examples for each essay
   c. Tell stories interestingly, yet professional
   d. Audio record and transcribe (or write as you speak)
   e. Organized structure

3. **Write**
   a. Start essay strong, the first impression matters
   b. Keep it engaging and interesting, but be careful with humor
   c. Don’t stop when you hit the length limit (on first draft)
   d. Tailor essay to each school
   e. Do not beg, blame, brag, or bore
4. **Revise, get feedback, revise**
   a. **Ask Yourself**
      i. How will this sound to grad school?
      ii. What does this essay say about the person who wrote it?
      iii. Did it get the key message across?
      iv. Have I been specific? (Show, rather than tell, and provide concrete details.)
      v. Does the essay say something meaningful about me? (Is it memorable? Could someone else have written it?)
      vi. Is it personal? (Does the essay sound like it was written in my voice?)
   b. **Revise for Style:**
      i. Vary sentence structure
      ii. Be simple and straightforward
      iii. Avoid passive voice
      iv. Be conversational without being too casual or too formal
      v. Use strong verbs
      vi. Avoid words you’ve never used before and unnecessarily fancy vocabulary
      vii. Eliminate clichés
      viii. Delete redundancies
      ix. Don't overuse adjectives and adverbs
      x. Make sure to convey your passion for learning
   c. **Get Qualified Feedback**
      i. Someone that knows you well (Professors, Family, Friend)
      ii. Someone that does not know you (Career Services)
      iii. Someone that is a great writer (Writing Center)
   d. **Final Revisions**
      i. Implement applicable feedback
      ii. Double-check everything we covered!
      iii. Read your essay aloud
      iv. If multiple schools, be sure you change the name of the school

Content developed from Kaplan Test Prep, US News and World Report, and GradSchools.com resources