

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

PERSONAL STATEMENT MUSTS	AVOID THESE AREAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide evidence (stories) that illustrate who you are, how you developed, and what matters to you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't recycle your resume or transcript
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Intellectual and career Goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't plea for help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a fit with the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't think that being qualified with qualify you
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow schools to infer your traits and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't include a laundry list of personal traits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include personal insight and rationale for your motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't speak negatively of anyone or anything
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw on all your experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't forget relevant academic , professional, or volunteer experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect your work and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume your experience will speak for itself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how you are unique and what you'll bring to the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't make assumptions about how you're viewed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it a sincere sales pitch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't pontificate, use clichés, wallow in emotion, or get needlessly fancy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't provide an easy reason for rejection

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