

# Writing a Personal Statement

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## Objective

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- Write an engaging and effective personal statement capturing your strengths and career goals.

## Purpose of a personal statement

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A personal statement, also known as a statement of purpose, demonstrates your unique qualifications to an admissions committee. It also illustrates your writing ability, creativity, and career goals. Admissions committee members look for interesting, insightful, and non-generic personal statements.

## Get started

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Before filling out the application, reflect on and make notes about your:

### Personal History

- Prior life experiences, events, and achievements relevant to your career choice or application to graduate school
- Life events are experiences that are distinct or unusual which relate to your professional goals
- People who have influenced your decision to pursue this field or who have had a significant impact on your values as they relate to this choice

### Academic Life

- Research interests and prior experience
- Academic accomplishments/recognitions
- Professors who have influenced you most academically

### Work Experience

- Previous jobs, volunteer experience, and/or extracurricular activities that have influenced your career choice or career goals

## Answer these questions

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1. What is special, distinctive, unique or impressive about you or your life story?
2. How did you learn about the field? What stimulated your interest in this field?
3. What characteristics and skills do you possess that enhance your prospects for success?



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4. Have you overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
5. Are there any gaps in your academic record that you want to explain?
6. What are the most compelling reasons for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
7. What are your short and long-term goals?
8. What is the most important thing for an admissions committee to know about you?

## Formatting tips

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1. Read the application carefully, follow the directions, and adhere to word or page limits. Most personal statements are 2-3 pages.
2. Be sure to answer the question/topic(s) posed in the application.
3. Choose a font style and size that can be easily read by your audience.
4. Write in first person.
5. Proofread for typos and grammatical errors.

## Common mistakes

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### 6. Sloppiness

Avoid spelling, punctuation, formatting, and grammatical errors. Be sure to leave yourself adequate time to edit and revise your essay. You do not want to send your first draft to the admissions committee.

### 2. Writing one statement for all schools

Learn about each school's program, including research interests and publications of faculty. Clearly state reasons for pursuing a degree from that school. Be sure to mention faculty members with whom you would like study.

### 3. Boring content

Have a positive tone, vary length and structure of sentences, and avoid clichés.

### 4. Sounding like everyone else

Identify your strengths and clearly articulate what sets you apart from other applicants.

### 5. Dwelling on crisis

If you discuss a personal crisis, it should relate to the purpose of your essay. Mention how it affected your personal goals, perspective, or academic performance.

## Evaluating suggestions

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Evaluating your personal statement is an important part of the writing process. Carefully read over your personal statement and use the *personal statement evaluation chart* on page 3 to critique your statement. Then ask at least one person, whose opinion you value, (e.g., friend, teacher, family member) to review and evaluate your personal statement using the *personal statement evaluation chart* criteria.

## Personal statement critiques

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You may bring your personal statement to the Career Center to be critiqued by a career advisor. No appointment is necessary. Career advisors are available 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday (except Fridays 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.). Bring an electronic and paper copy of your statement. You can use the Career Center's computer lab to make changes as needed.

## Do's & Don'ts

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### Do

- Aim for depth, not breadth.
- Write why an event is significant to you and what you learned from it.
- Focus on one or two specific themes and discuss related experiences.
- Concentrate on capturing the reader's interest in the opening paragraph.
- Have specific reasons for applying to each program.
- Mention specific faculty with whom you are interested in working.
- Strive to make the essay unique by using concrete examples from your life experience. This allows you to stand out from other applicants.
- Select people who you trust to read and provide feedback on your personal statement, especially if English is not your primary language.
- Create a conclusion that refers back to your introduction and ties your points together.
- Connect life experiences to your professional goals and career motivation.
- Articulate short- and long-term career goals clearly.
- Be selective when choosing supplemental materials to submit (only submit materials requested by school).
- Comment (briefly) on irregular grade trends, discrepancies on transcripts, or circumstances that affected test scores.

### Don't:

- Submit the same essay to multiple schools.
- Write a clichéd introduction or conclusion.
- Preach to the reader.
- Repeat information elsewhere in your application.
- Discuss money as a motivating factor.
- Cram too much information into the essay.
- Exceed word and/or page limits.
- Exaggerate your qualifications or experience.
- Discuss potentially controversial topics (e.g., politics or religion).
- Include extraneous materials (e.g., addendums to applications, videotapes, or audiotapes) specifically unless asked.

## Personal statement evaluation chart

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Questions to Ask	Comments	N/A
1. Did my opening paragraph capture the reader's attention?		
2. Is the statement as a whole interesting?		
3. Is it well written?		
4. Is the statement positive and upbeat?		
5. Does it reflect well on me and my qualifications?		
6. Is it an honest and forthright presentation of me?		
7. Does it answer key questions posed in the application?		
8. Was relevant material omitted?		
9. Is there inappropriate or irrelevant material in the statement?		
10. Does the reader gain insight from reading the statement?		
11. Is it free of typos or other errors?		
12. Has the statement distinguished me from other applicants?		

## Sources of additional information

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This guide was adapted from these resources; some of which are located in the Career Center Library.

<i>Perfect Personal Statements</i> .....	III C2S81
<i>Sample Personal Statements</i> .....	Ready Reference Shelf
<i>How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School by Richar Stelzer</i>	
<i>Real Essays For College &amp; Grad School</i> .....	IIC2M35
<i>Get into Graduate School</i> .....	IIC2K31



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