Writing a Personal Statement for Graduate or Professional School

OFFICE OF CAREER PLANNING • THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

This is one piece of the application that gives you the opportunity to use your own voice and make a case for yourself. A well-written personal statement may prove to be the deciding factor for admission.

Do:
- Follow directions and guidelines; answer all parts of the prompt and stay within the word count.
- Write straight from the heart. Create a sense of your personality.
- Catch the reader with a bold or interesting opening statement.
- Use business writing style showcasing your best writing ability. This is not a term paper.
- Include specific reasons for your interest in this area of study, highlights from your academic achievements (i.e. Independent Study), future plans and details of special and unique experiences (i.e. travel or community service).
- Write in an active and engaging style that pulls the reader in.
- Use direct rather than passive statements. Use action verbs.
- Use the first-person voice (i.e. "My goal for becoming a doctor…" or "I learned…").
- Demonstrate who you are and what you have done with specific scenarios and examples.
- Be concrete and specific, emphasize your strengths. Be positive and enthusiastic.
- Allow time to make several drafts.
- Use perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- Use Career Planning, the Writing Center, your professors, and others for multiple proofreads.
- Demonstrate your determination, persistence, confidence (not arrogance) and enthusiasm.
- Carefully and gently persuade rather than use a hard sell approach.
- Paint a picture of yourself that shows you are a good fit for their program.

Don't:
- Don't use flamboyant words or academes.
- Don't use clichés, jargon, or quotes by others.
- Don't use cute or multiple fonts.
- Don't elaborate too much, but don't be too brief either.
- Don't tell your story from childhood unless it is very interesting and relevant.
- Don't say "I have always wanted to be a ___, or I always knew I'd be a ___". It sounds boring.
- Don't use common phrases such as "make a difference", "change the world", "help people".
- Don't discuss anything controversial or that you don't know much about.
- Don't mention personal problems (unless you have to) or make excuses.
- Don't be vague or abstract.
- Don't use the second- or third-person voice (i.e. "When you do this..." or "It was a great experience.")
- Don't use passive statements.
- Don't repeat your resume – boring
- Don't praise them. It sounds insincere.

Helpful Prompts for Generating Personal Statement Content

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1. What moment or series of moments confirmed that you wanted to be a_____ or attend _____school/program?

2. What experiences, qualities, accomplishments, or characteristics make for a successful _____? (You may want to write more than paragraph.)

3. Tell one or two stories that show that you have these experiences, qualities, accomplishments, or characteristics.

4. Why are you a good fit for this program/field/career?

5. How can this degree/program/school help you get there?