

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is a chance to provide a glimpse of who you are, to humanize yourself as an applicant. Among the standardized test scores and other quantitative measures utilized in an admissions process, the personal statement is your opportunity to become real to those reviewing your application. There are typically two types of personal statements:

1. Generalized Personal Statements: Some programs may simply request that you submit a personal statement with little to no guidance regarding what should be in that statement. Others in this category may have a very general prompt such as “Please provide a personal statement discussing your interest in our program and the experiences you have had that confirmed this interest.” In either case, this is your chance to show graduate & professional schools your motivation for pursuing this degree and why you are such a good fit for the program specifically.

2. Specific Prompt Personal Statements: Other programs will ask specific questions that may be more detailed or unique. In this case, it is extremely important to answer those questions, not solely provide the type of content you might have written in response to a generalized personal statement prompt. An example of this type of prompt is: “Discuss professionalism and what it means to you as a future graduate student.”

Regardless of the type of prompt, graduate and professional schools will use the personal statement to answer key questions during the admissions process:

- ▶ *How self-aware is this individual about what motivates and drives them?*
- ▶ *What qualities do they possess that are of value to this program, institution, and career field?*
- ▶ *Do we believe they are a fit for this profession and should pursue this above all other options?*
- ▶ *Can we envision this person being our colleague in ten years?*
- ▶ *Was the writing engaging enough that now we want to talk to this candidate in person?*

Getting Started

The first sentence can often be the hardest. Stop, breathe, and just begin. Try one of these strategies:

Make a Life Timeline

Outline your life in chronological order. Include anything that is important to you, from running a marathon to conducting research with faculty. Put this aside for a few days, then revisit it and ask “What are the things that most excite me and relate to my pursuit of graduate school?”

Free Write

Sit down and start writing. Don’t worry about if it is “good,” just write. Here are some questions to free write in response to:

- ▶ *Why am I interested in pursuing this program of study?*
- ▶ *What experiences have confirmed my commitment to pursuing this program?*
- ▶ *Who has influenced my decision?*
- ▶ *What challenges have I faced on the way to graduate/professional school?*
- ▶ *What kind of impact do I want to have on the world with this degree?*
- ▶ *Why do I believe I will be a good fit for this program & excel in it?*
- ▶ *What am I most proud of?*

**start early.
start now.**

Austin E.
Knowlton Center
for **career exploration**

Tips for Success

Narrate a Compelling Story

Show, don't tell. Give readers a story to connect with. Provide examples but don't reiterate your résumé. Don't list experiences, but make meaning of them. Discuss what life events brought you to this decision, and the experiences that confirmed it for you.

Demonstrate What Makes You a Strong Candidate

What do you most want others to know about you? What kinds of qualities are necessary for the profession you wish to pursue? Where have you demonstrated those qualities? The personal statement is your chance to show why you are a good fit for the profession and the program in an authentic manner. You don't have to be "unique," you just have to be real and do not exaggerate or lie!

Write Intuitively

Gaining the perspectives of others is important, but remember that it is your voice that needs to be on display. The manner in which you write should come naturally to you and feel authentic.

Focus on a Few Things, and Tell Them Well

Don't tell your audience ten things broadly, tell them 2-3 things powerfully. Strive for depth over breadth by focusing on key ideas and expanding on those well.

Edit, Review, and Find Support EARLY

Expect and appreciate multiple drafts. When considering who to ask to review your statement, utilize different points of view. Be sure to avoid using jargon and always check for grammar and spelling errors!

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ▶ Stay away from references to childhood, unless specifically necessary as part of your narrative.
- ▶ Avoid empty generalities such as "I've always been fascinated by science." Details and specifics are much more interesting and important!
- ▶ Don't lecture. Your audience is well-versed in the subject area you are applying to; they do not need to be told things about the profession.
- ▶ Think long and hard before writing about controversial topics or areas that are very personal.
- ▶ Be mindful of your tone when writing about negative events: focus on learning or personal growth when discussing challenges.
- ▶ Avoid praising someone else excessively. Focus on how you interpreted experiences, what it meant to you, and how it impacted your view of the profession.

Who can help you in this process?

- ▶ Faculty and Staff: *email them to set up a meeting to discuss your personal statement process*
- ▶ The [*Lisska Center for Intellectual Engagement*](#): stop by the Gilpatrick House to ask for help
- ▶ Alumni or Professional Mentors: *reach out via email to ask for their input*

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