

Personal Statements

Applications for graduate and professional school include many components including test scores, forms, transcripts, resumes and personal statements. The personal statement can be one of the most important parts of the application that help you stand out from other candidates, yet many candidates find this the most difficult part of the application. Below are some tips and insights to help you make a great impression by writing an interesting and compelling personal statement.

What Programs Want to Learn

Graduate programs include personal statements to understand more about you as a candidate including:

- Your ability to write in an interesting, thoughtful, and organized manner.
- Assess your *fit* for the program you're applying to.
- How this educational pathway aligns with your experience and future goals.
- Your knowledge and/or philosophy of the field of study and how it influences you to pursue this professional path.
- How you are unique and how you add diversity of background and experience to the program.
- They want to learn more about you personally – more than the list of skills and activities listed on the application forms and resume.

What to Write About

- Be sure to answer all of the questions asked in the application, don't leave anything out.
- Use short personal stories or narratives to illustrate how you became passionate about the field. Use *specific* examples from unique moments in time to vividly get your point across.
- As you tell your stories, weave in skills you developed or intellectual learning that came from those moments in your classes, internships, or life experiences.
- If there are any problems in your academic record or gaps in your professional experience, address those *briefly*.

What to Avoid

- Think what the most common responses likely would be to the questions, then be sure NOT to write that! i.e. "I have wanted to be a lawyer for as long as I can remember..."
- Avoid negative experiences, or generally having a negative tone in your essay.
- Don't simply re-list everything on your resume, your essay should have more depth of content that is more personal and reflective.

Engaging Opening Sentences

Selection committees will read many applications in a short time period and the candidates will often blur together quickly. Having a memorable opening sentence and compelling stories in your essay will make you stand out. Below are some opening sentences for real essays to give you an example of how to have an engaging opening sentence. In each case, the reader's curiosity is piqued luring them to read more. For example:

- Through seven year old eyes, I watched in terror as my mother grimaced in pain.
- The rapidly growing elderly population is becoming a serious problem in many countries.
- When you grow up in a place where isolation is a way of life, just getting to town can be a challenge.
- We slept in what had been a gymnasium.
- At first glance, my life is easily dissected, my experiences neatly separated into geographic locations: Michigan, Mississippi, Texas, Colorado, Washington, Japan, Colorado again and now Wisconsin.
- Claire stood at my door crying because her roommate ate her cookies.



Questions for Reflection Before Writing

What are some of your most memorable or life changing moments that influenced your professional path?

When did you know you wanted to pursue this field? Was there a particular experience or event that helped you decide?

Is there an event, job, class, experience, or moment in life where you learned more about yourself and your abilities or that sparked your interest in this field of study?

What experiences have provided the most in-depth intellectual challenge that helped build your readiness for the rigors of graduate school?

What are your career goals and how does graduate or professional school relate?

Final Tips

- Start your personal statement early in the process and don't wait to the last minute.
- Get feedback on your essay drafts early and don't get too tied to your first draft. It will likely take several revisions to get to the best statement for you.
- Research the programs you plan to apply to and incorporate information about why their school is a great fit for your professional aspirations.

Additional Resources

It is recommended you have your essay reviewed by a team of experts including your career advisor, one or more faculty members, as well as someone in the Writing Center.

Career Advising Appointments: www.du.edu/pco | 303-871-2150

Writing Center: www.du.mywconline.com | 303-871-7456

