PERSONAL STATEMENT

What is a Personal Statement?
A personal statement or statement of purpose is an essay usually required along with a graduate or professional school application. This document brings your application to life by establishing a positive impression and showing your unique brand to the admissions committee. The personal statement should describe who you are, why you are applying, your unique qualifications, and what you plan to do in the future.

Brainstorm
Reflect on content to include in your personal statement.

Helpful Questions
- What experiences define who you are today?
- What extracurriculars, jobs, and/or volunteer experiences have shape you?
- Has there been research, specialized programs, or projects that have motivated you to apply?
- Which ideas, fields of research, or problems especially intrigue you?
- If you are a nontraditional student, what led you to pursue this program at this point in your life?
- What kind of _____ do you want to be and what impact do you want to have?
- Were there any unusual or difficult circumstances in your childhood or undergraduate years?
- Do you have family members in your chosen field?
- Was there an adult or professor in your life who was especially influential?
- What qualities do you associate with this profession and how do you align with them?
- What are your strengths (not already highlighted in your application materials)?
- How does this specific program align with your career goals?

Develop a “Hook”
Start with an attention-grabbing, brief, story about an impactful experience or pivotal moment that led you down the path to graduate/professional school. Weave this theme throughout the entire essay.

Draft
- Create an outline. Structure your brainstormed thoughts into a framework.
- Answer the exact questions or prompt(s) in the application. Following instructions is essential!
- Write, write, write
  - Don’t edit or worry about the length!
  - Stress your unique qualities
  - Include elements from your personal history, academic life, volunteer and/or work experience
  - Concentrate on one theme throughout your essay
  - Show, don’t tell; use storytelling rather than a list of statements
  - Tell why, not what; provide just enough narrative detail without losing focus on why the experience led you to who you are or why you’re applying to the program.

(Optional) Take a Break
Put away your draft for at least 2 weeks. Don’t even look at it!
Revise and Submit
Edit by focusing on deleting non-essential details or phrases, rather than adding more information. Request feedback from a trusted individual to catch typos and unclear messaging.

Helpful Questions
- Does the essay reflect who I am?
- Do I have transitions between paragraphs to tie the essay together?
- Have I tied the hook into the body of the essay?
- Have I asked a faculty member, staff member, or counselor at the Center for Career and Professional Development to review the essay?

Avoid
- Writing one general statement for all schools.
  (An exception is applications required to be submitted through a common application portal)
- Including boring content
  Write with a positive tone, vary the length and sentence structure, and use professional language. Avoid numerical lists, clichés, and chronological histories.
- Sounding like everyone else
  Identify your strengths and write about what sets you apart.
- Ignoring the guidelines
  Prioritize formatting guidelines required by the school. If there are no specifications, double space your document and keep to 2-page lengths.
- Being shy
  Write with confidence about your personal growth. Speak boldly about your interests and how they match with the program you are pursuing.
- Writing untruths or half-truths
  Only write what is true and reflective of who you are. Writing what you think someone from the program wants to hear will only decrease your chance of ultimate success.
- Spelling and grammar errors
  Accurate spelling and grammar are essential and reflect your brand.
- Portraying yourself as unrealistic
  Discuss goals and plans in terms of feasible timetables.
- Sharing irrelevant stories
  Address the question asked. Keep from confusing readers by deviating from the main theme of the essay with too many details/stories.