

MALONE CENTER FOR CAREER ENGAGEMENT

PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDE

Below is a guide and template for crafting your personal statement for graduate school applications. We hope this will help get you started in the process, however, please note that there is no prescriptive way to write a personal statement. Each student may decide to take a different route in their writing, and faculty may be looking to learn specific things about an applicant as they read the statement depending on the program. For more ideas or clarification on the process, consult with your professors and/or a Career Advisor.

The personal statement component of your application is very important. This is where you get to show the admissions committee who you really are and why you would be a perfect fit for their program.

Each program is unique. Some have different requirements or prompts for the personal statement. If you are applying to several programs, be sure to write a tailored statement for each program.

****Good writing doesn't happen in a vacuum! Have a career advisor, a mentor, or a professor help you edit your personal statement. Having several people edit will ensure you are submitting your best writing.**

In the introduction of your personal statement, tell a story. Start in the middle of the action with your first sentence. Place your reader in a setting and make them feel the emotions you felt. Use the story to show your passion for the topic you hope to study. Conclude your story with a sentence that connects your story to your current goal of pursuing graduate school.

The body of your personal statement is where you communicate at length why you are qualified for the graduate program you are applying to. Communicating your qualifications well means that your statement could be 2-4 pages in length. What experiences have sustained your ambition over time? Choose 2-3 experiences to highlight in your essay. What knowledge have you learned in your courses that makes you want to pursue further education in this subject matter? What abilities do you have that will make you successful for graduate school and make you stand out from other candidates? Why does this particular program interest you? Be specific in what reasons you have for choosing this institution above others. The body of your personal statement should clarify your reasons for applying to a program for the admissions committee. After reading, they should understand more of who you are as a person, apart from your grades and test scores.

Conclude with your goals. How will this program in particular help you reach your professional goals? Consider both your short and long term professional goals and how they connect back to your experiences. As you connect where you want to go with where you have been, you give the admissions committee an invitation to partner with you in the journey you are on.

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GETTING STARTED. . .

While some programs may specify the topic or prompt(s) to which you must respond, others may leave the content up to you. In general, the following topics are of interest to graduate and professional programs:

- Your reasons for pursuing a graduate degree
- Areas of study in which you plan to specialize
- Career goals and plans for the future
- Reasons for interest in the specific institution, program, or faculty members
- Preparation for study in the field - which may include academics, involvement, research, and work or internship experience

1. IDENTIFY YOUR PROMPT



Remember: Tell Your Story!

- Start in the middle of the action
- Place the reader in the setting and make them feel the emotion
- Show your passion!

Sample Introductory Sentence: “Everything was new. As I rode along the gravel road, looking out the window, I was amazed at the culture and beauty of Guatemala. . .”

Include a sentence connecting your story to your current goals.

Example Connector Sentence: “I can confidently say that my experience abroad in Central America was the initial spark that ignited my passion for human service and global relations.”

2. OUTLINE YOUR INTRODUCTION



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3. OUTLINE YOUR BODY

What experiences have sustained your ambition in this topic over time? Think about:

- Research experience
- Volunteer experience
- Courses taken
- Internship
- Study away experience

Example Sentence About Sustained Ambition: “My internship with a local advocacy group sustained my interest in human service and counseling”

Why are you qualified for this graduate program? Include things like:

- The knowledge you gained from courses
- The skills you developed through experiences
- Abilities that make you stand out

Examples of Knowledge, Skills & Abilities:

- Observe specific behaviors
- Understand trauma-informed care
- Verbal and written communication
- Critical thinking
- Balance and time management

Why does this particular program interest you? Think about:

- Research opportunities & Faculty
- Culture & Cohort size
- Location
- Specialties offered

Examples of Program Interest:

- Offers a Masters and PhD program with multiple concentrations
- Small cohort (tight knit)
- Close to home

A large empty rectangular box for writing the body of the personal statement. Three arrows point from the left side of the box to the three text blocks on the left, indicating that the content from those blocks should be used to fill the box.

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4. COME TO A CONCLUSION

Conclude with your goals and your story outcome. Think about:

- How will this program help you reach your goals?
- What are your short and long term personal and professional goals?
- Bring your story back in - reiterate how this experience shaped your interest.

Example Sentence About Goals:

“Through this program, I hope to gain practical and theoretical knowledge in the field by participating in internships and gaining additional work experience. My long term goal is to work as a mental health counselor.”

Example Sentence of Bringing Story

Back In: “Through my experience in Guatemala, I gained an appreciation for human service across cultures. My experiences so far have helped prepare me for this work and I am excited to become a dedicated member of the counseling community.”



GENERAL TIPS:

- Start early! Personal statements should be revised a few times. Give yourself plenty of time to have it reviewed and make changes with the Furman Writing Center, the Malone Center, and faculty.
- Avoid using cliché statements such as “I have always been interested in . . .” or over-used descriptors such as “interesting” or “amazing.”
- If you are concerned about an aspect of your application, such as your GPA, use your statement as an opportunity to address it and explain.
- Include a clear thesis statement.
- Develop a consistent theme throughout your statement that ties your experiences together.