

WRITING A GRADUATE SCHOOL

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Personal statements are used by graduate admission committees to help establish an applicant's writing ability and potential fit for a program (or scholarship). It also serves to distinguish you from competing candidates by providing a more complete picture than found on your résumé/CV, proves that you can write clearly and coherently, and oftentimes reveals your core values.

Getting Started

- Begin working on your statement early to allow ample time for document preparation and editing – this will show in your final product. It is typical to write multiple drafts.
- Tailor each personal statement to a specific program – a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not effective.
- Research the field you are considering to determine the type/style of personal statement needed (see Resources on page 2).
 - Professional associations for your field can be a good first source to find writing guidelines and samples.
- Identify and articulate the top skills, personal characteristics, and experiences (e.g., academic, travel, work, service) that are expected to be part of the personal statement.
 - Give particular attention to those factors that contribute the most to making a candidate a strong applicant or show they are the right “fit” for each particular program.

Content

- Programs may require specific responses or provide you with prompt questions, or the application may not include any directions regarding the content. Without a prompt, you can decide which topic(s) to introduce. Topics may include:
 - Reason(s) for pursuing a graduate degree
 - Reason(s) for wanting to pursue a career in this field
 - Area of study in which to specialize
 - Successes enjoyed and obstacles overcome
 - Past experience(s), career goal(s), and plans for the future
 - Reason(s) for having an interest in a specific institution and/or program
 - Preparation (i.e., academics, work experience, service, involvement) for study in a particular field
- Consider developing well thought-out answers to the following questions, which will help you connect your past and current experiences with your future plans:
 - What personal characteristics do you possess and how have you demonstrated them?
 - As a student, how will you contribute to this specific graduate program? How are you prepared to do so?
 - In what ways will you represent this program as an alum and a professional in the field?
 - How will you continue to grow in the field and contribute to it upon becoming a professional?
- Be concise, focused, and on topic while telling your story. It should be compelling; describe what makes you a special, unique, and distinctive applicant; and provide details about what or who shaped and influenced you.
- Provide specific, detailed examples which effectively demonstrate each point– show yourself in action.
 - If your content is not relevant to the theme of your essay, remove it. Delete any unnecessary words.
 - Avoid points that are vague, overly generalized, or incompletely illustrated.
- If a prompt is provided, consider how to distinguish your essay from others which will be written to the same prompt; show why you are uniquely qualified for the program.
- Avoid technical language (remember: this is not a research paper) or academic rhetoric which can sound overly philosophical or poetic.
- Portray genuine enthusiasm without gushing, oversharing, clichés, generalizations, being overly positive/negative, and platitudes (e.g., always, never, love, all, passion).
- Avoid over-sharing, particularly personal information covered by privacy laws (e.g., FERPA, HIPAA).

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Format

- Personal statements are short essays - often 2-3 pages or about 750-1000 words - unless otherwise stated in the application instructions.
 - If there is a word and/or page limit, adhere to it. Committees may stop reading statements at that cutoff.
 - Answer the question(s) provided – no more, no less.
 - Stay on topic and avoid tangents.
- If a prompt is provided, be sure to answer each question completely.
 - Choose whether you prefer to answer each question separately, or synthesize your answers into a single, longer response. Prompts may provide cues as to style, but if not, choose a technique that makes sense.
- Typically, the statement should take a broad-to-narrow approach to telling your story (see diagram below).
- Your essay should be enjoyable and develop momentum for the reader, building to the most important details.
- The opening sentence must catch the reader’s attention – be certain that the first sentence of each paragraph introduces a compelling theme that is then developed and illustrated.
 - This tells the reader what to expect and helps them to follow your argument.
 - This opening sentence sets the tone for your statement, identifying key points that are elaborated later.
- The intent of the last sentence is to pull everything together. Use specifics to share your vision of your future, rather than concluding with a summary.
- Admissions committees are looking to accept applicants who demonstrate careful work and a polished final document that leaves a strong impression and demonstrates academic aptitude.

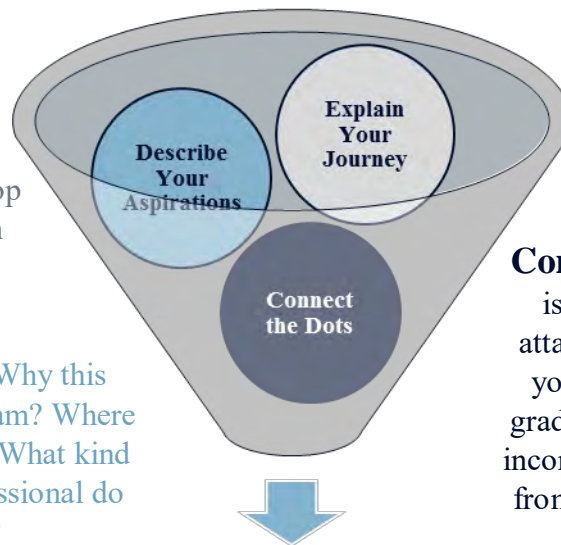
Revising and Refining

- Proofread, proofread, *proofread!* This is the best way to catch typos, grammatical mistakes, and other errors.
- Revise, edit, and request feedback multiple times.
 - Share with people who have strong writing and grammatical skills and who know both you and the field.
 - Use the UConn Writing (W) Center and Center for Career Development for help with writing and revising.

The Broad-to-Narrow Personal Statement Structure

Your Journey: Who are you (as a student, individual, and professional)? How did you develop an interest and gain experience in your field?

Your Aspirations: Why this career path and this program? Where do you see it taking you? What kind of graduate student/professional do you want to be?



Connecting the Dots: How is this program essential to attaining your goals? How can you benefit the program as a graduate student? How will you incorporate knowledge and skills from your graduate studies into your work in the field?

Personal Statement

Resources

CCD Resources	https://career.uconn.edu/considering-graduate-school/
UConn Writing Center	https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/personal-statements/
Yale University	https://ocs.yale.edu/yale-college/application-process-grad-school
DePauw University	https://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/writing-a-personal-statement.pdf
Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL)	https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/969/1/