



Writing a Personal Statement

Many graduate and professional schools consider excellent writing skills a must for their prospective students. Therefore, your personal statement could be the most important part of your application. Even outstanding grades or standardized test scores will not redeem a poorly written essay. Consider the following items when composing your personal statement.

Most personal statements are of two types

General Comprehensive Statement

This statement is usually required by law, medicine, and most graduate programs, and the applicant is left to determine its contents.

Specific Questions Statement

This statement is frequently required by graduate business programs and sometimes by law schools. When writing this kind of statement, be sure to answer the questions asked in the application.

Do:

- Make sure you have analyzed your motivations for continuing your education and that you can honestly articulate them. Graduate committees quickly see through greed or other motives.
- Read the application carefully before responding and be sure to modify or tailor each statement to the specific school's application prompt.
- If possible, make your personal statement a story. Do not make the mistake of boring the committee. Does your life contain interesting and challenging events? Have you overcome any great obstacles to achieve your goals? If so, talk about them.
- Find an angle that represents you uniquely. Remember that the personal statement is your chance to display not only what you have done, but, more importantly, who you are, and what your character contains.

- Concentrate on your opening paragraph. It should grab your reader's attention. Also, make your prose lively and terse; write in the active voice.
- Consider when and how did you originally become interested in the field, and what have you done since to learn more about it. Has what you learned confirmed your desire to work in this field? Explain.
- Indicate what your career goals are, and how will a degree from this school, in particular, help you accomplish these.
- Explain any strange gaps between grades and standardized test scores, grades between semesters, or long absences from school.
- Consider how you demonstrate important personal characteristics like compassion, integrity, and leadership skills.
- Use concrete examples and details to support the claims you make about yourself.

Don't:

- Include any accomplishments or events from high school or earlier, unless they are part of your story.
- Discuss controversial topics, i.e., religion and politics.
- Exceed the word limit.
- Restate information—awards, scholarships—noted elsewhere in your application.
- Make the mistake of trying to guess the admission committee's minds. It will be very clear if you are only trying to say what they want to hear.