

Writing Personal Statements for Graduate and Professional Schools

A personal statement is often a vital component of an application to graduate programs and professional schools. It is essential that you tell your personal story as it relates to the program in a way that is memorable, compelling, and concise.

There are two basic types of personal statements: 1. Response to specific questions, and 2. General/comprehensive. In either case, be sure to follow supplied instructions carefully. Remember that this is a sample not only of your written communication skills, but also your analytical skills.

To generate ideas, write responses to some of these self-reflection questions:

- What is special, unique, or distinctive about your life story?
- What details of your family, history, or life events have influenced your goals?
- When/how did you become interested in this field?
- What has reinforced your conviction that you are on the right path? What insights have you gained?
- How have you explored this field? (E.g. classes, reading, work, volunteering, shadowing, conversations)
- How have your experiences contributed to your growth?
- What are your career goals and how will this program help you achieve them?
- Have you overcome obstacles or hardships?
- What personal qualities or skills do you have that make this field a good fit? (Especially when these qualities align with the core values of the program)
- What themes or constants can you identify that unite your education and experiences?

Begin writing:

- For your first draft allow yourself to write freely, without constraints on length. You can edit later.
- Your opening should be unique and memorable. Avoid templates or formulaic statements.
- Identify a central idea or theme and pull that thread through your statement to create cohesion.

Develop your ideas:

- When talking about experiences, ensure you are providing NEW information, not repeating basic descriptions that can be found in other components of your application, such as a resume or CV. Instead, focus on how the experience provided new motivations, insights, or perspectives.
- Demonstrate that you understand what makes the program or school unique. This can include values, specializations, practical experience, affiliations, or specific faculty members (including their research and publications). Every program has their particular strengths, and your statement is an opportunity to show how these align with your interests and goals.
- Use key discipline-specific vocabulary and terminology (without being pretentious) when appropriate to demonstrate your familiarity with the field.
- Avoid clichés (“I want to help people”). If it’s something almost anyone could say, get rid of it in favour of something specific and memorable.
- Demonstrating vulnerability/humility, sincerity, and growth makes for a compelling read.

Polish:

- Be concise. You are not required to use the full word limit.
- Read your statement out loud. You will be surprised at what this activity will help you catch.
- Ensure you have followed instructions carefully.
- Your writing should be professional, but sound like your natural voice.
- Speak in the first person using an active voice. E.g. use “Through this course I learned...” rather than, “This course gave me...”

[Book an appointment](#) with a Career Advisor for further guidance or specific feedback!

References:

[Perdue University Online Writing Lab](#)