

Personal Statements



Writing Center

989-964-6061, www.svsu.edu/writingcenter

The single goal of the Personal Statement is to get admitted to the program for which you are applying. All other applicants, of course, have the same goal. So the challenge is to present yourself as a candidate who is both as well qualified as the other applicants but who also brings some unique qualities or strengths to the program. You want to present yourself in the best possible light—but without any braggadocio.

The type of Personal Statement(s) required may vary by program:

- A *comprehensive general* Personal Statement provides wide latitude in organization and content (e.g., law school or medical school).
- A Personal Statement guided by *specific questions* needs to address those questions even as it conveys your overall qualifications as a candidate (e.g., business and some graduate programs).

The process of writing a Personal Statement usually involves multiple drafts, with informed feedback and personal introspection guiding your revisions. You may wish to think of your process this way:

RESEARCHING

Begin by researching the program(s) to which you are applying. What are the values and philosophy communicated via their literature and website? How do your goals and values align? What aspects of the program are most significant for you?

If you are responding to questions that must be addressed, determine exactly what each question is asking and how best to formulate your response.

REFLECTING

Consider your background, interests, and unique qualities, to identify personal aspects you may wish to incorporate in your Statement:

- What are your career goals?
- What is distinctive/impressive about you/your life story? Any unusual obstacles or hardships? Any significant achievements or unique experiences?
- What details about your life might help the committee better understand you or distinguish you from other applicants?
- When/how did your interest in this field evolve? How did it originate? How has it shaped your education or past history?
- What aspects of your work history are relevant or interesting?
- What special skills or personal characteristics equip you for success in this field?
- Are there any academic gaps or unusual patterns you might need to explain?
- What makes you a strong candidate for the program?

As you review your reflections, can you find a “hook,” an interesting angle or focus that would make your Statement memorable?

DRAFTING

Begin drafting by recalling your audience and purpose:

- If you are responding to questions, review the specific aspects that need to be included. It may be tempting to use the same Personal Statement for several applications, but unless the questions asked are identical, this is unwise. Draft a separate Statement (it may have many of the same elements, of course) for each application, meeting the specific guidelines for each program.
- Review your reflections and compose a draft, including all the ideas you think should be included.
- Provide specifics—examples, details, instances, reasons; you wish to *show*, not just tell.
- In most cases, omit references to high school or to highly controversial issues.
- When you have completed a draft, put it aside for a day or two.

REVISING

Analyze your draft, paying special attention to several aspects:

- Review length requirements. Do you need to cut text to meet requirements? Anything you wish to elaborate on?
- Is your tone professional? Does the Statement use the vocabulary of the discipline? Does it demonstrate your knowledge of the field?
- How effective is the opening? How well does it create a framework for the rest of the Statement? Does it compel the reader to continue reading? Would the conclusion make a better opening? Would paragraph two be a better way to begin?
- What organizational pattern did you use? (If you are responding to questions, you need not do so in order; it's more important to create a coherent written presentation of yourself.) How logical is the organization? Do transitions guide the reader through the Statement?
- Does your conclusion leave the reader with a sense of closure? A memorable impact?
- How effective is the language overall? Any clichés, platitudes (e.g., "I want to make a difference in the world"), or generalities that weaken its impact?
- Have you gotten feedback on your draft from knowledgeable readers?

EDITING

Allow some time to pass so you can review your draft again with fresh eyes, this time paying attention to the finer points of language and usage:

- Is your Statement *error-free*?
- How effective are the sentences? Can they be easily understood with a single reading? Is there sentence variety? A smooth rhythm?
- Have you used strong, active voice verbs?
- Can you replace prepositional phrases, adjectives, and adverbs with more effective nouns and verbs?
- Have you avoided pretentious language?
- Is your Statement *error-free*? (This time read the Statement backwards to catch final typos and spelling errors.)

RESOURCES

Examples are available in the Writing Center binder

Personal Statement Websites:

www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/writer_resources/writing_tips/personal_statements.htm

owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_perstate.html

www.uwc.ucf.edu/Writing%20Resources/Handouts/personal_statements.htm