

GRADUATE SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENTS

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What is a Personal Statement?



A personal statement is a written opportunity to sell yourself in your graduate school application. It is often a requirement for graduate programs in all academic fields.

Understanding the Qualities of a Strong Personal Statement

- Your resume or CV may show the reader what you have done, and your personal statement explains why
- Do not write your resume in narrative form. Rather, consider an overarching theme to tie everything together, starting with an anecdote. Alternatively, you can use a big metaphor or analogy through the essay
- Your statement should be deeply personal, giving the admissions committee insight into your passions and your ultimate decision to pursue a career in this field
- Give yourself as much time as possible to write your statement. It will take longer than one evening to get your personal statement right. Plan for weeks or months to work on your statement
- A compelling and introspective personal statement can make the difference between getting an interview and facing admission rejection

Brainstorming Ideas

Many personal statements often start by explaining why that particular area or career field is awesome; the admission committee already knows that. You should explain why YOU want to pursue this field. What is it about the field that resonates with who you are? Naturally, this takes a lot of reflection. Here are some questions you can consider as you go about brainstorming:

What motivates you to learn more about this area of study?

What is something you want the admissions committee to know about you that isn't in your application?

Where were you born, how did you grow up, and what type of childhood did you have growing up (perhaps including interesting stories about your siblings, parents, grandparents)?

What kinds of early exposure to the field left an impression on you as a child?

Did you become familiar with and interested in the field at an early stage of your life? If so, why?

What are your key strengths, and how have you developed these? What are your favorite activities?

What steps did you take to familiarize yourself with the profession?

Did you shadow a professional in the field? Did you volunteer or work in a related setting? Did you get involved in related research?

What challenges have you faced? Have these made an impact on what you chose to study?

How did you make the decision to apply to graduate school?

What was your "Aha!" moment?

You shouldn't try to answer all of these in your essay. Try only a few main points that will carry over into the final draft. Start developing your narrative by prioritizing the most impactful responses to these prompts and the ideas that are most relevant to your own experiences and goals. The perfect personal statement not only shows the admissions committee that you have refined communication skills, but also conveys maturity and professionalism. It should also display your motivation and suitability for the field.

After brainstorming, you should be able to clearly see a few key ideas and intersections that you want to write about. Once you've isolated the elements you want to explore in your essay (usually two to four key ideas), you can begin building your outline. In terms of structure, this should follow the standard academic format, with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Considering Your Audience

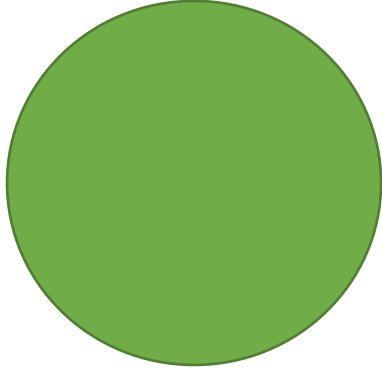
As you begin thinking about what to include in your personal essay, remember that you are writing for a specific audience with specific expectations. You should think about your experiences with reference to your chosen profession's competencies and to each school's mission statement so that you're working toward your narrative with the institution and broader discipline in mind.



If your chosen profession has competencies, you would be able to find these on the professional association's website. You can search for professional associations through [CareerOneStop](#).

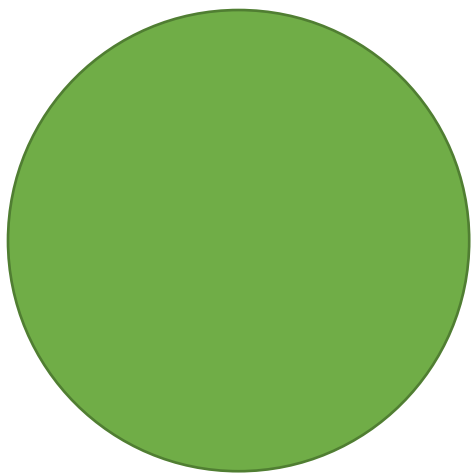
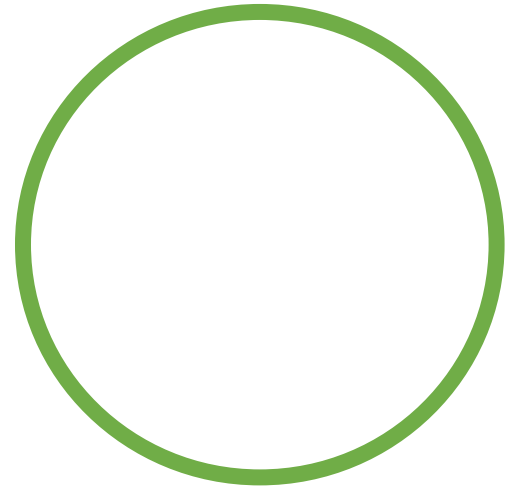
A school's mission statement will articulate the overall values and priorities of each university, giving you insight into what they might seek in candidates, and thus what you should try to display in your personal statement. Echoing the values of the university helps illustrate that you are a good fit for the program.

The Prompt



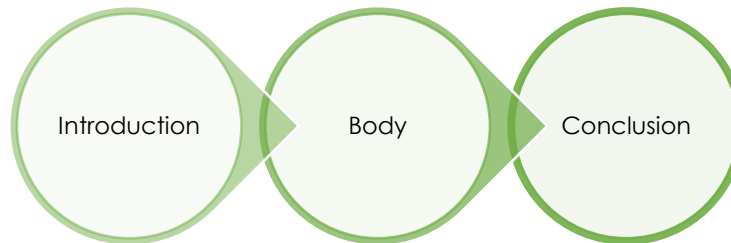
Some personal statement prompts give specific guidelines on content, format, word count and submission method. They may include a series of specific questions that you must answer throughout your essay.

Other applications provide little in the way of guidance, asking prospective students to expand on why they want to apply to the program or supply information on their backgrounds and professional goals.



It's crucial that you read and understand what is expected of your personal statements. It won't matter how beautifully crafted the statement is if it doesn't address the prompt or if it disregards stated length requirements.

Structure



Introduction

The introductory paragraph and, even more importantly, the introductory sentence of your essay, will most certainly make or break your overall statement.

Ensure that you have a creative and captivating opening sentence that draws the reader in. This is your first and only chance to make a first impression and really capture the attention of the committee. Starting with an event or an Aha! moment that inspired your decision to pursue a medical profession is one way to grab their attention. The kinds of things that inspire or motivate you can say a lot about who you are as a person.

The broader introductory paragraph itself should serve several functions. First, it must draw your reader in with an eye-catching first line and an engaging hook or anecdote. It should point toward the qualities that most effectively demonstrate your desire and suitability for your chosen field (you will discuss these qualities further in the body paragraphs). Finally, it must also serve as a roadmap to the reader, allowing them to understand where the remainder of the story is headed. If your prompt asks you to answer specific questions, make sure your introduction is leading you into answering those questions.

Body

In the body of your essay, elaborate on the ideas that you have introduced in your opening paragraph by drawing on your personal experiences.

Since your introduction provides a roadmap for where the rest of your personal statement is going, you will discuss these major points by describing your

experiences. Again, if your prompt asks specific questions, the body of your essay will answer these. The experiences you draw upon could include a selection of personal/family experiences; work, intern, or shadowing experiences; and volunteer and extra-curricular experiences. Just like an academic essay, you will devote one paragraph to each major point, explaining this in detail, supporting your claims with experiences from your life, and reflecting on the meaning of each plot point in your personal narrative, with reference to why you want to pursue this path.

Conclusion

Your conclusion should be insightful, captivating, and leave the reader with a lasting impression.

Your final statement should not be a simple summary of the things you have discussed. Although you want to re-emphasize the major ideas of your essay, you should try to be creative and captivating, much like your opening paragraph. Sometimes if you can link your opening idea to your last paragraph it will really tie the whole essay together. The conclusion is just as important as the introduction. It is your last chance to express your professional aspirations. You want to impress the reader while also leaving them wanting more. In this case, more would mean either getting accepted into the graduate program or getting an interview so they can learn more about who you are!

Writing About Discrepancies

Part of your essay's body can include a discussion of any discrepancies or gaps in your education, or disruptions in your academic performance. If you had to take time off, if you had a term or course with low grades, or if you had any other extenuating circumstances that impacted your education, you can take time to address these here. It is very important to address these strategically. Do not approach this section as space to plead your case. **Offer a brief summary of the situation, and then emphasize what you learned from such hardships.** Always focus on the positive, illustrating how such difficulties made you stronger, more resilient, or more compassionate. Connect your experiences to the qualities desired by your profession. Most of all, if you feel like you have to explain yourself, take accountability for the situation. State that it is unfortunate and then redirect it to what you learned and how it will make you a better professional. Focus on being positive and do not lament on the negative situation too much.

Helpful Writing Tips

Show; don't tell. Instead of listing adjectives about yourself, tell your personal story and allow the admissions committee to paint the picture for themselves.

Display professionalism. While writing, keep the concepts of respect for others, maturity, and emotional intelligence in the forefront.

Write for non-specialists. Remember that ensuring reader comprehension is what makes you a good communicator.

Distinguish yourself from others. Use this opportunity to highlight what you bring to the table, and what you will contribute as a student at their institution.

Brainstorm before writing your first draft. Outlining and considering the content and style of your essay prior to beginning the essay will make the writing process much smoother.

Read your draft aloud. This can help you notice errors or where connections between ideas aren't as clear as you thought.

Receive feedback from others. Avoid having people too close to you read your work. They may refrain from being too critical in an effort to spare your feelings.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Revisit your resume and involvement

Use the same personal statement for multiple schools, leading you to not answer schools' unique questions in the prompts

Submit to the wrong school. Before you submit, double check where your essay is going

Violate the character count

Criticize other applicants

Use fancy words to make up for insecurities about your writing skills. This can be confusing

Ramble. This can come across that you worked on your essay at the last minute

Cast yourself as a victim. When describing your personal experiences or background, even if you have been through terrible things, cast yourself as an agent in your own life

Understanding GradCAS

GradCAS is a full service, Web-based Centralized Application Service (CAS) that allows a student to apply to multiple graduate degree programs on one campus, or to multiple programs across multiple campuses, by submitting a single application for enrollment.

If you're familiar with the Common Application Organization (Common App) from when you applied to your undergraduate education, GradCAS is a similar service for graduate school applications. The Graduate Enrollment Management Centralized Application Service (GradCAS) simplifies the process of applying to graduate enrollment management programs. You start by selecting the programs you wish to apply to, then you submit one application that includes all necessary materials. Once received by GradCAS, your application and materials are transmitted to all of your selected programs.

The applicant is able to manage the entire process, including submission of supporting documentation, transcript(s) and recommendation requests, as well as answer additional unique questions asked by individual campuses and/or programs, including essays, personal statements, CVs/resumes or other documents of work samples.

Some common GradCAS disciplines include:

- AADSAS/Dental Medicine
- CASPA/Physician Assistant
- EngineeringCAS/Engineering
- NursingCAS/Nursing
- OTCAS/Occupational Therapy
- PharmCAS/Pharmacy
- PSYCAS/Psychology
- PTCAS/Physical Therapy
- SocialWorkCAS/Social Work
- SOPHAS/Public Health
- VMCAS/Veterinary Medicine

Your chosen program(s) may or may not use GradCAS. We recommend researching the individual graduate program's preferred method of applying.