

PERSONAL STATEMENTS: GETTING STARTED

Institutions use personal statements as a way to figure out what kind of a person you are and whether you would be a good fit for their program. A personal statement is a great way to show your experiences and why they make you an ideal candidate for a given program. It is also the only document in your application that can explain any hiccups in your transcript.

DON'T	DO
List all of the good grades you've gotten – they will see your transcript	Show how your academic interests have extended outside of the classroom
Create a prose résumé – there are other sections of the application more appropriate for résumé-like entries	Include details and narrative that a résumé can't provide
Focus on the negative – even if there is something in your application that you need to explain, don't spend too much time on it	Briefly touch on weaknesses and spin them as quickly as possible (i.e., if you had a difficult semester, briefly show how you've learned from it and move on)
Lie or write what you think they want you to write – insincerity comes through pretty clearly in writing	Be yourself – consider your audience and craft your essay accordingly
Overdo it with the thesaurus. Ten-dollar words are not worth much if your overall message is unclear	Write in your own voice. Use a vocabulary that is intelligent and true to your writing.
Say that you are going to graduate school because you don't know what else to do or because you want to please your parents...	Take the time during your writing process to truly identify why you want to go to this particular school

THE FIRST DRAFT

An effective personal statement should: 1). Hook your audience by having a compelling (non-cliché) introduction. 2). It should reveal your experiences—where you gained knowledge or developed skills that make you the ideal candidate for a program. 3). It should show your goals and how the program you are applying to will help you achieve them.

- 1. The “Hook”:** The first paragraph should engage the reader and make them want to keep reading your paper. Remember, the program's admissions committee you are applying to have hundreds (even thousands) of personal statements to read. The stronger your beginning, the more likely they will get to the end.
- 2. The “Why I'm an Ideal Candidate” Section:** This should be the bulk of the personal statement. In this section, you should give specific accounts of situations or events that taught you something essential. This might be a semester abroad that showed you how people in a different country live, or it might be a time you helped organize a fundraiser and learned how giving back to a community can be very fulfilling. It might be even simpler and less obvious, like growing up in a large family and how it helped you with your communication skills, or when you broke your leg and had to relearn how to walk.

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The point here is to be as specific as you can. It's always more effective to show your audience how you are a hard worker (you had to get up at eight in the morning every day for four months to go to physical therapy for your broken leg) than just telling the audience (I am a hard worker). "Show, don't tell."

This is also the perfect opportunity to show the admissions committee of some of the volunteer/shadowing work you have engaged in the past or to make them aware of the fact that you went to school full time and worked part time. This shows you are responsible and a multitasker.

- 3. The "What My Goals Are and How I Will Achieve Them" Section:** This is the natural place to end the personal statement, and it should only be a paragraph long. The idea here is to explain what your goals are in this field and why you chose this particular program. If you are able to tailor your personal statement to one program, do it. You may want to talk about specifics for the school: their faculty, their research or internship opportunities, or anything you find exciting or helpful in their program. If you can't tailor your personal statement, use this section to talk about your general interests in the field. Applying for medical school? What medicinal focus do you find yourself leaning to? Applying for nursing school? Perhaps you want to work specifically with children or older patients, or perhaps you want to be a nurse practitioner someday.