

Personal Statement Guide

For those applying to graduate school, a personal statement is often one of the required elements of the application that needs to be submitted. These personal statements can range from asking for a general personal statement in which the applicant can decide the topic and direction of the statement or a specific set of questions with word limits that the applicant will need to answer.

Either way, personal statements are a great way for an admissions committee to learn more about the applicant as a person and as it applies to the graduate program for which the applicant is applying. This is the applicant's opportunity to set him or herself apart from the rest of the applicants!

Here are a few tips as you begin writing your personal statement:

- Write a different personal statement for each school to which you are applying. Each statement should be tailored to the question(s) the school is asking for you to answer, the type of program offered at the school, the school's mission, etc.
- Focus on telling a story to make it interesting for the reader. Support your story with specific examples.
- Utilize your opening sentence and paragraph to hook the reader – just like an essay you'd write for a class. Grab the reader's attention, so that he or she will continue to read your personal statement.
- Think hard about what sets you apart from the other applicants. Do not write a general personal statement that could be used for someone else.
- Avoid reiterating your resume or other application materials. Your personal statement should give the committee new information about you that cannot be found in the rest of your application.

Before you begin writing your personal statement, it is helpful to reflect on some topics about which you may consider writing. Consider the answers to a few of the following questions:

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- How have you learned about this field – through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- What are your career goals?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre LSAT or GRE scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, and/or persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for graduate school – and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

Sources: OWL at Purdue