Crafting a Successful Personal Statement
Deanne Gute, Academic Learning Center, 2017

Where to Start???

Sample Prompts

- Please provide a statement, no more than two pages in length, about your personal history, family background, and other influences on your intellectual development.
- Please provide more information about yourself in a written personal statement. The subject matter of the essay is up to you, but keep in mind that the reader will be seeking a sense of you as a person and as a potential student and graduate of _______.
- Describe a significant experience from the past two years which required you to interact with someone outside of your own social or cultural group (ethnic, religious, geographic, socioeconomic, etc.). How did this impact you? What did you learn and what surprised you?
- Describe an ethical dilemma and how you handled it.

Take Inventory: What Do They Want?
What Do They Want?

Consider personal characteristics, academic attributes, and professional assets most desired in the graduate or professional program and career you plan to pursue.

What is a successful _____ like?

Get started the easy, low-stress way: with self-reflection and brainstorming.

What Do You Have to Offer?

List all possible evidence from your life, work, education, and volunteer experiences that could show reviewers what you are like and what you can do.

All reviewers care about
- Motivation
- Commitment
- Work Ethic
- Sincerity/Authenticity

Examples of pursuing your interests beyond what’s required

Examples of what you learned from your experience

Insights that may set you apart

Evidence of capability to do graduate-level coursework and research
+ **DRAFTING CONTENT**

- Outline and organize a rough draft in three parts: your past, present, and future.
- Remember that you don’t have to write the essay in the order it will be read!

+ **Writing the Introduction: Create a Positive First Impression**

- Write the easier parts first; find inspiration for your intro. from the body or conclusion of your rough draft.
- Consider relevant anecdotes, quotes, or other interesting devices to introduce your essay. Avoid clichés and bland statements of fact.
- Be yourself!
- See samples

+ **Writing the Body of the Essay: One Idea per Paragraph!**

- Organize so that each paragraph makes a single clear point about yourself:
  - I didn’t anticipate that my job as an emergency room tech would involve performing chest compressions on coding patients, witnessing people’s loved ones passing away, or working to calm psychiatric patients and listening to their unique stories. My experiences in the ER have taught me the importance of staying positive while continuously adapting to changing circumstances.
  - Back up every generalization you make about yourself
    Examples + Interpretation

Ask: What does this example show about me?
**Drafting a Conclusion**

- Leave the reader with a sense of completeness
- Summarize why you’ll be a positive asset to the program
- Visualize your future specialization, desired accomplishments, type of professional you want to be
- Convey for the final time a sense of your spirit

**Consider Your Word Choice Carefully**

Deal with weaknesses honestly, but with a positive spin, if you think they have potential to damage your chances of acceptance.

- Show how you dealt with setbacks in a positive way: problem-solving
- Show your commitment to improving yourself, serving others, etc.
- Examples:
  - “Working two jobs to pay for rent and food contributed to the grades I received in my junior year . . .”
  - “My strong sense of self-reliance has been an asset throughout my life, but I realized I needed assistance to improve my performance in ———. My work with a science tutor helped me raise my F grade to an A when I repeated the course.”

**Avoid generic self-promotion & empty praise for disciplines and universities**

- “I have always worked hard to make a difference.”
- “Medicine is fascinating/rewarding/interesting”
- “I am interested in your incredible Public Policy program.”
Avoid vague narrative
- “I have a commitment to lifelong learning which keeps me up to date in the ever-changing field of IT.”
- “The best part of my internship was experiencing how project team members would be there for each other.”
- “My study abroad taught me about the challenges of being a minority language speaker.”
- “I worked with a diverse group of seniors at New Aidaya in Cedar Falls.”

Edit Thoroughly to Keep the Cringe Factor in Check
- Rants
  “Constantly confronting the masculinist hegemony of Sioux Falls, South Dakota made me realize the importance of practicing dentistry in a more progressive setting.”
- Self-pity
  “When my parents divorced, there was no money left for school. I had to quit Biology Club to watch my little sister. I would have liked to be in on all the opportunities my classmates had, but family comes first, so I didn’t mind making the sacrifice.”
- Showy displays of vocabulary
  “I still remember how elated I was when my professor told me I would be his research assistant working on looking for lytic genes on spore-binding phage (SBP), which might be an antibiotic for anthrax. We kept asking ourselves why something went wrong instead of how something went wrong, and I learned a lot more from my mistakes than from my achievements. When I learned that I got my first S.O.A.R grant, it felt like all my hard work had paid off. I am still working on the sequencing of the SBP and the results never cease to amaze me.”

Customize Each Personal Statement
- Make sure you’ve done your research; show you’re well-informed about each program.
- Consider different specializations, faculty interests (and compatibility with your own research), and other unique program features.
PERFECT THE WRITING

- Pay attention to the craft of writing. The finished statement should be lively, focused, well-organized, exhaustively-edited, and proofread thoroughly.

  Do multiple revisions and proofreading reviews with time in between.

  Get additional feedback from anyone and everyone who will agree to read it.

Use Your Personal Statement to Assist Recommendation Writers

- Provide the personal statement, résumé, any necessary forms, deadlines, and addresses. Prove that you’re organized, capable, and appreciative.

- Show appreciation for your recommenders’ time and willingness to do you a favor.

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