



Personal Statements

Tips for Writing a Great Personal Statement

- ✓ Follow a past – present – future format
- ✓ Avoid excessive use of “I”
- ✓ Use graduate-level language, including keywords and terms that are important to the field
- ✓ Everything you write should answer the questions the graduate program will be asking:
 - “Why should we select this individual?”
 - “What does this individual offer that others may not?”
 - “Does this individual have the academic/research background to succeed in our program?”
 - “Is this individual sufficiently motivated to complete our program?”

Opening Paragraph:

- ✓ Needs to be attention-grabbing so reader will want to continue reading
- ✓ If appropriate, speak about your epiphany – the event, or series of events, that led up to your decision to pursue this field (not everyone has an epiphany)

Middle Paragraphs:

- ✓ This should be the “meat” of your document
- ✓ Present a compelling case for your ability to succeed in, and complete, this graduate program
- ✓ Provide evidence of success:
 - Research projects
 - Rigor of coursework
 - Other academic/co-curricular accomplishments

Closing Paragraph:

- ✓ To the degree possible, express your future career goals
- ✓ Show fit & match with each program to which you are applying
 - Specific professors
 - Unique aspects of curriculum
 - Geography
- ✓ Your last sentence should leave the reader with a strongly positive impression



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Things to Mention, if Applicable:

- ✓ Proficiency in a foreign language
- ✓ Relevant internship/work/volunteer/observation experience
- ✓ Participation in professional associations
- ✓ Relevant lab/computer skills
- ✓ Specialized knowledge, skills, or abilities
- ✓ Anything unusual about you
- ✓ Applicable things you will be doing between the time you apply & the time you would begin a graduate program (i.e. research, presentations, internship)

Overcoming Difficulties:

- ✓ If your GPA, test scores, or other application materials are not as strong as you'd like them to be, the personal statement is most likely the place to address.
- ✓ Counter your weakness by referring reader to another aspect of your application that is stronger (i.e. if your test scores are below average, indicate that your GPA is a much better indicator of your ability to succeed in graduate school)
- ✓ It is o.k. to re-calculate your GPA in these ways:
 - Minus the freshman year
 - Minus one semester
 - Major courses only
 - Last four semesters only
- ✓ The appropriate place for any explanations is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way into the document.

Sources for Assistance:

- ✓ Career Center
- ✓ Writing Center
- ✓ Faculty/Administrators

For a personal statement critique or any other career-related issue, come see us in the Career Center!

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