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:
  o “Why should we select this individual?”
  o “What does this individual offer that others may not?”
  o “Does this individual have the academic/research background to succeed in our program?”
  o “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:
  o Research projects
  o Rigor of coursework
  o 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
  o Specific professors
  o Unique aspects of curriculum
  o Geography
✓ Your last sentence should leave the reader with a strongly positive impression
How-To Guide

Personal Statements

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:
  o Minus the freshman year
  o Minus one semester
  o Major courses only
  o Last four semesters only
✓ The appropriate place for any explanations is about ¾ 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!

SUB 3100
Monday-Friday 8am-5pm
660.785.4353
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