

Personal Statement Guidelines

STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING

Actions:

- Devote time to reflect on the following questions.
- Discuss them with friends or family members.
- Jot down notes. In some cases write sentences.
- Think about the flip side of each question. For example, why are you really committed to the field of biology despite pressure from your parents to become a lawyer or to get a job?

Your answers to some of these questions will form the heart of your personal statement.

1. How did your pre-college education influence your decision to pursue graduate study in your field?
Think about: High school courses, teachers, special programs, student organizations, and community or volunteer work.
2. How has your college experience influenced your decision?
Think about: College courses, professors, academic interests, research, special programs, student organizations, and the decision-making process you went through to choose your major.
3. How has your work experience influenced your decision?
Think about: Internships, externships, part-time jobs, summer jobs, and volunteer or community work.
4. Who has had the most influence on your decision to pursue graduate study? In what ways?
Think about: Parents, relatives, teachers, professors, clergy, friends of the family, college friends, parents of friends, local merchants, supervisors, coaches, doctors, dentists, lawyers, etc.
5. What situation has had the most influence on your decision?
Think about: Family, academic, work or athletic situations. Think about happy, sad, traumatic, moving, or memorable situations.
6. What personally motivates you to pursue graduate study in this field?
Think about: Your personal skills, interests, and values.

STEP 2: WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

Actions:

Incorporate your responses to the above questions. Begin writing your first draft:

1. Develop an outline of your statement prior to writing. It doesn't have to be detailed. It can be three or four main points in the order you want to make them.

2. Accentuate your strengths and what makes you unique.
3. Explain your weaknesses in positive ways. For example, refer to them not as weaknesses but as areas for improvement or growth.
4. Paint pictures and tell stories about what makes you special. In this way the admissions readers will remember you. The story can be happy or sad. The more feeling you can inject into your statement, the more you will stand out.
5. Find out the specific orientation and philosophy of the graduate program. Adapt and refine your statement to fit. This will make you stand out from other applicants who recycle the same personal statement with each application.

Suggested Outline

The word count or length of your personal statement will vary from school to school, and is typically double-spaced. Here is a suggested outline. You should adjust the main point of each paragraph and number of paragraphs depending on the desired length of your personal statement and the areas in your background that you choose to emphasize.

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| Paragraph 1 | A personal human-interest story |
| Paragraph 2 | Your academic interests and achievements |
| Paragraph 3 | Your relevant work and/or research experiences |
| Paragraph 4 | Your career interests |
| Paragraph 5 | Why you are interested in this particular school |
| Paragraph 6 | The qualities you will bring to this school |

REFERENCES

Write for Success: Preparing a Successful Professional School Application, Third Edition, October 2005 by Evelyn W. Jackson, PhD and Harold R. Bardo, PhD. NAAHP, National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions, Inc.

"Perfect Personal Statements" by Mark Alan Stewart. Peterson's Guide 2004

PERSONAL STATEMENT CRITIQUES

Contact the University Career Center & The President's Promise and make an appointment with a career counselor to have your personal statement critiqued. For grammar, writing, or spelling help, contact the Writing Center at www.english.umd.edu/academics/writingcenter. Ask a professor if they would review it as well. Having feedback from professionals with different points of view can only make for a stronger personal statement overall.

Adapted with permission from the Office of Career Services at Rutgers University, New Brunswick Campus.