

Essays & Personal Statements

Essays and personal statements afford you an opportunity to present your personal, educational and professional background while sharing your motivation to pursue an advanced degree – in essence, to tell your story.

Know the Goal

Admissions committees evaluate not only credentials, but also your ability to express thoughts and opinions in a clear, concise manner. Reflect on the uniqueness of your background. Be specific about your goals. Your essay should convince the committee that you would be a valuable new member of their program.

Write a Winning Essay

An effective personal statement or essay employs effective storytelling. This includes providing an introduction that draws your reader's attention, paragraphs with main points and supporting details and a strong, persuasive conclusion.

Begin with brainstorming.

Ask yourself a few questions to get the ideas flowing:

- **How has Princeton prepared you for graduate study?** Consider your courses, independent junior- or senior-year research and academic achievements.
- **How has work experience prepared you?** Consider your internships, summer jobs and volunteer work.
- **What are your influences?** Consider courses, teachers, special programs and community service.
- **What do you hope to gain?** How will graduate study advance your goals?
- **What motivates you to pursue an advanced degree?** Consider your unique interests, skills and values.
- **Where do you see yourself headed?** How does this degree allow you accomplish your goals?

- **Why here?** Why are you interested in this particular graduate program and specific institution?

Create an outline.

Using your responses to the questions above, create an outline for your essay.

- **Focus.** Select three or four main aspects of your background that you want to highlight in your essay.
- **Showcase qualifications.** Match your background and goals to the mission of the program.
- **Be memorable.** Illustrate that you are a unique candidate using relevant skills, abilities and accomplishments.

Follow directions.

Schools often have different requirements for essays or personal statements. Review them carefully for each program to which you are applying. It is very important to address all aspects of the questions or topics they present, while staying within stated length requirements.

Be concise, specific and complete.

You will need to cover a range of topics in a limited amount of space. Focus on themes and specific goal statements rather than attempting to provide a biography. Provide specific, unique examples – and don't generalize. Instead of saying "I like to help people," showcase volunteer work and articulate how that experience influenced your decision to enter your chosen field.

Revise, and then seek feedback.

With a first draft complete, revise and edit. Focus on the details and structure of your argument. Share it with others. Outside readers can help you make improvements.

- **Leverage your network.** Faculty, friends and family are great possibilities.
- **Visit Career Services.** Schedule an appointment with a career adviser.
- **Applying to business or law school?** PreLaw and Pre-Business Advisors are available.
- **Applying to medical school?** Consult the Office of Health Professions Advising.

Develop a final draft.

Having shared your draft, revise as you see fit. Ultimately, you need to feel confident that this is the best reflection of you and your background.

Proofread!

Be sure to proofread the final draft several times before submitting your personal statement. Your essay must be error-free.



Find Us

Office of Career Services
36 University Place, Suite 200
Princeton, NJ 08544
Hours: 8:45 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Walk-in appointment hours:
• Mon., Wed. & Fri.: 8:30-10:30 a.m.
• Tues. & Thurs.: 3-5 p.m.

Contact Us

Phone: 609-258-3325
Fax: 609-258-2919
General:
career@princeton.edu
Recruiting:
recruit@princeton.edu

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