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Guidelines - Personal Statement

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“Personal Statement is not the only document that will get you the admission but if you don't write a good one you can not get the admission”

Important Note: Keep PS to one page – anything beyond, admission committee is not going to read it.

1) Questions to ask, when writing a personal statement

- (1) What are the reasons for choosing this university or field?
- (2) What are my career plans?
- (3) What accomplishments do I want to emphasize?
- (4) What outside interests do I have?
- (5) What contributions can I make to this job or program?

Answers to two or three of these questions should give you enough material for first draft.

2) Personal Statement Tips

- Know your audience (4 to 6 paragraphs)
- Be straightforward in writing
- Edit and proofread your work carefully
- Don't crowd with too much text
- Choose appropriate font (times roman, Garamond)
- Second Opinion
- Don't let form get lost in shuffle

3) Be aware of:

- Self-Congratulatory Statements
- Self-Centered Statements
- Emotional Stories
- Using tired analogies
- Inconsistencies
- Misspellings, poor grammar

4) Don't use such analogy

- “Life is like a box of chocolates”
- “Life is a road”
- “Life is a journey”
- “Life is a book”



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5) Purpose a personal statement? (NO MORE THAN ~800 WORDS)

- Discuss your personal motivations
- Academic interests
- Relevant research or experience
- Long-term objectives
- Your specific interest in attending XYZ University or job or field
- How will you benefit the current research or project with your expertise

6) Structure of a Personal Statement

1. **Introduction:** Articulate a personal or professional inspiration; provide a quick, meaningful snapshot of yourself and establish your thesis.
2. **Body:**
 - a. Discuss your academic background/ experience as a learned set of skills in relation to your thesis.
 - b. Establish some long-term objectives to show your sense of purpose.
3. **Conclusion:** Close with specifics about your target program and how your goals and background link to that program.

7) What are some details you might include?

- Anything special about the academic program you are in now
- Participation in a first-year or senior seminar or thesis program
- Past academic scholarships (and the criteria)
- Intern, co-op, or work experiences relevant to graduate study
- Educational training
- Interesting personal stories related to graduate study (or your ability/ motivation for graduate study)
- Workload while going to school
- Experience you've had between undergraduate and graduate school to prepare you for the field
- Other activities you participated in besides academia (if juggled successfully)
- Service projects
- A rising GPA (if the first two years weren't so hot)

8) What tone/style do you use?

1. Assume a respectful, individual tone throughout.
2. Use narratives and anecdotes.
3. Use definitions when necessary.
4. Use metaphors, similes and analogies.
5. Use active, powerful verbs.

9) Don't forget to leave time to revise!

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10) What Committees Look For in Personal Statements

- a. A story! A mental picture of who you are as a person as it relates to your “fit” for grad or professional school for your future profession
- b. Maturity, self-knowledge, purpose, drive
- c. Evidence you’ve done your homework
- d. Writing skills and articulateness

11) Kinds of Personal Statements

1) General, Comprehensive Statements

Allows you latitude to write freely.

2) Response to a specific question

Less latitude, but still important to be thoughtful and persuasive.

12) Sample Questions

- Describe the contributions to the groups or organizations in which you have participated?
- What kind of expertise will you bring to the lab/project you are applying for?

13) Developing your personal statement

- a. Discuss the development of your interest (anecdote)
- b. Sell your unique strengths, leadership qualities, experience, and academic preparation for the position or experience
- c. How will this experience contribute to the success of your future (outlined) plans/career goals
- d. Describe your “fit” with school/ Assurances

14) Discuss the development of your interest as an anecdote.

- Describe SPECIFIC experiences that helped you explore and identify your career interest
- Significant role models and influences?
- This will demonstrate you are committed for the long haul.

Would this be a good anecdote for a personal statement?

Every since I could remember, my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncle sand great grandparents, on my father side, pressured my cousins and me to be a medical doctor. When I graduated high school with honors, everyone insisted that I would “be the one” who should be the doctor. To my family’s disappointment, I decided to major in criminal justice- a field that was more aligned with my interest and personality. However, strangely enough, my first college part-time job was at the local hospital as a nurse assistant. After a few months, I was promoted pay and my responsibilities now also included collecting laboratory samples throughout the hospital for testing. After spending some time observing doctors perform their duties, it dawned on me that

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this is something that I could do as a career. I finally submitted to my family's dream. I graduated with a B.S. in biology with a 3.8 GPA and earned a 32 on the MCAT. I am now ready to accept the challenge of medical school to become a medical doctor.

- **Anecdotes Grab the Reader's attention:**

- "The passing of my mother and grandmother from breast cancer when I was 15 years old opened my eye to a whole new perspective on life."
- "For the first 20 years of my life, my activities—and self-confidence—were circumscribed by the fact that I was a chronic, allergic, asthmatic." (Med school applicant)
- "At first glance, the most remarkable thing about me might seem to be the fact that I have the temerity to apply to law school in the first place. I have a blemished academic record that includes withdrawals and failing grades, and by the time I receive my degree in May, I will have spent six years as an undergraduate. Looking beyond these statistics, however, to the circumstances of my life, it becomes clear that what is more remarkable is the fact that I have survived at all."

15) Revise your PS as you gain more skills

- If you have completed at least one extramural summer research internship, focus on demonstrating the knowledge you have gained from your research experience:

"My interest in research was nurtured when I joined the _____ program during my undergraduate years of college. The program afforded me the opportunity to learn basic research skills, which were enhanced when I participated in a summer research internship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during the summer of 2010. My research project was entitled, "Characterization of the Mas Gene Product as an Angiotensin II Receptor". We tested the hypothesis that overexpression of the mas gene product in NIH 3T3 cells would result in increased binding of Angiotensin II. We concluded in this study that transformed NIH 3T3 cells bind 80% more angiotensin II when compared to untransformed cells."

16) Additional Tips:

1. **Sell your unique strengths, leadership qualities, experience, and academic preparation for the position or experience**
 - Personal background; what distinguishes you as a person?
 - What strengths/ leadership would you bring?
 - What do your experiences and choices say about your value system, interests, and motivators?
 - Unique skills that demonstrate the depth of your experience in the field?
2. **Special Conditions or Circumstances**



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- Be open about obstacles encountered & overcome (illness, tragedy, 35 hr/week job, etc.)
- Inconsistencies in grades or test scores? Explain in brief, non-apologetic, and non-defensive manner
- Turn bad experiences into a learning experiences
- **How will this experience contribute to the success of your future/career goals?**

17) **SHOW THAT YOU HAVE DONE YOUR HOMEWORK!**

- Benefits of program in preparation for education or the profession
- What's next after completing the program.... the ultimate goal!
- Why this program and why now? Research the program & explain its appeal.
- OR if you are apply for job, how will this position will help you in your career

18) **Discuss your fit with the school and provide Assurances:**

- Refer to specific aspects of the program that match your interests
- **"Flirt" with them** without being sycophantic
- "Time magazine reports that Yale is the number #1 in the nation for preparing molecular biologists.
- I will be an asset to your summer program and a motivation to other participants if given an opportunity to participate in the summer program.

19) **Personal Statement Do's** 😊

- Give yourself plenty of time to write it
- Give it a theme or thesis
- Use concrete examples of life experiences to distinguish yourself
- Write about what excites you!
- Begin with an attention-grabbing lead and get to the point early on
- Use clear, direct, concise writing that tells about your experience
- Form conclusions that explain the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and your field, your future goals, and your future plans
- Restrict to one page only
- End by referring back to the main theme
- Revise at *least* 3-5 times then have someone else critique it several times
- Proofread by reading document out loud

20) **Things to Avoid** ☹️

- Generally, references to experiences or accomplishments before college
- Controversial or highly unconventional topics (i.e. religion and politics)
- Information from "out of left field" – i.e., doesn't fit into the story you're telling
- An autobiography or resume approach
- Vocabulary words you don't know
- Generic statements: "Communication skills are important in this field."

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- Made up things!
- Statements like: “I’ve always wanted to be...”

21) What if I have writer’s block?

- Just start writing down your thoughts – worry about how it sounds later
- Answer the questions on the sheet provided
- Ask others to help you brainstorm
- Come to your Career Advisor with a draft (whatever form it is in)

22) Characteristics of a Successful Applicant

- Ask the experts – those like the people who will be reading your applications.
- Ask the experts – those who write CV’s all the time; especially those in your field.
- Always revise! Edit! Proofread!
- Be Perfectionist
- Remember this is all about your life.

Common Mistakes in Personal Statements

1. **Repeating what is written in the application form.** Your essay is your opportunity to tell the admission officers something that you could not include into your application form or delve into something you wrote there. There is no point in simply retelling your application or CV.
2. **Not writing to the specific university.** Apart from telling about yourself, your statement should also demonstrate how you would fit in at the university you are applying to. Explain one or two things about the university that make it the best one for you. Make sure that you are not writing only the general things that can be true for any university.
3. **Having a boring introduction.** It is not a good idea to start your essay by repeating the question asked or introducing yourself. Think about something to grab the attention of the admission committee. For example, you can start from conveying something that you really believe in or describing a situation that influenced your way of thinking.
4. **Trying to make too many points.** It is better to focus on a single well thought-out point than briefly mentioning many different ones. Think about supporting your points with various examples.
5. **Not sharing something about yourself.** When writing you should always ask yourself if your essay reveals something about your character. Your essay should be unique and personal.
6. **Forgetting to proofread.** Not only proofreading helps to avoid spelling, grammatical or punctuation errors, but also gives you an opportunity to check if your essay does not accidentally contain the name of another university you are applying to.
7. **Forcing humour.** Do not try to sound witty or funny if you are not. In any case if you include a joke into your essay, be sure to ask an adult or two to read it to see if they agree with you that it is funny.
8. **Trying to be someone else.** Don't try to seem like a perfect student who is committed to every subject area, has numerous talents, plays multiple sports and enjoys volunteering and extra-curricular activities if it is not who you are. Just be yourself and express your genuine thoughts and feelings.
9. **Not answering the question.** Each application form includes brief instructions on the points you are asked to cover in your essay. Make sure that your essay addresses those particular issues.
10. **Writing your personal statement (essay) at the last moment.** It is not wise to hurry up and writing your essay the night before it is due. Start writing well in advance, take some time to think about it and return to it later to polish.

Possible Content of Statement

- **Why do you want to do the course/research?**

Try to convey your enthusiasm and motivation for study/research. Don't try to write what you think they want to hear, write your real reasons. Write about any projects dissertations or extended essays you have done if they are relevant or demonstrate relevant skills. Mention any prizes you have won, also travel or study abroad and relevant employment. Describe anything that shows creativity, dependability or independence.

- **Why this subject?**

Be clear about why you have chosen this. Is the programme noted for a particular emphasis, specialty or orientation? When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it? What insights have you gained? How have you learned about this field - through classes, seminars, work or conversations with academic staff?

- **Why this university?**

Are there **specific academic staff, you want to do research or study with?**

- **What academic skills have you got to offer?**

Computing skills, knowledge of relevant scientific techniques etc. If your "A" levels were poor (or you didn't do these, try to show an upward progression during your time at University).

- **What personal skills can you offer? e.g. ability to work in a team, with little supervision.**

Demonstrate that you've done your homework about the course/research and that you've seriously considered your strengths and weaknesses for postgraduate study or research. If you have done vacation jobs, what skills have you learned e.g. teamworking, communication, working under pressure? Have you had to overcome any obstacles or hardships in your life? This may show evidence of determination/resilience.

- **What are your strengths?**

In what ways are you better than other applicants? If you can't answer this question, don't expect the selectors to answer it for you!

- **What is the relevance of your first degree to this study?**

Point out any circumstances that may have affected your academic results, that you think should be considered by the selectors.



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- **What are your career aims?**

You may not have a very clear focus on what you want to do afterwards, but you should have some ideas. A clear direction will strengthen your commitment to do well in your studies and selectors will know this. Your desire to become a lawyer, lecturer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience in your statement.