

# Graduate Application – Personal Statement: Paragraphs 1 & 2

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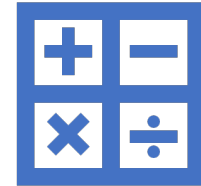
GRAD496A

# Goals for today

- Brief overview of the personal statement
- Brief overview of the 5-paragraph statement
- Discuss the first and second paragraph
- Discuss examples
- Provide writing tips
- Brainstorm ideas for your first and second paragraphs

# Question Slide

- Why do graduate programs make us write about ourselves?
- How much weight does the personal statement hold in our overall application?



# Personal statement

- AKA
  - Letter of interest
  - Letter of intent
  - Statement of purpose
- A brief, persuasive essay about you
- Tells the admission committee
  - Who you are
  - How you landed here
  - Why you are a fit and match

# Personal statement

- Opportunity to communicate who you are and why you are a good fit and match with the program and faculty
- Communicates information that cannot be provided with test scores or grades.
- Directions for each program can be found in the application portals
- READ the essay prompt!

**Not following the directions or question is a big red flag to committees**

***Why???***

# Personal statement in 5 paragraphs

1. Introduction – A story, communicates distanced traveled
2. Your relevant experience – Demonstrates that you are prepared for graduate school
3. Your research interests – Illustrates what you want to study in graduate school
4. Program & faculty match – Addresses who you want to study with and why this program
5. Conclusion – Describes your future plans after completing the program

# Paragraph 1 - Introduction

- First impression
- This is not an autobiography
- Share relevant personal information
- Who is your audience?
- How does your personal story relate to your goals?
- What do you want them to know about you?
- What makes you stand out?

# Paragraph 1 - Introduction

- Personal narrative that centers you
- Self-reflexive
- Beginning, middle, and end
- Provides interesting and descriptive details of a sequence of events
- Shows the distance you have traveled to be where you are today



# Paragraph 1 - Introduction

Can address the following:

- What is something special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?

# Cautions-Paragraph 1

- Share personal events with a purpose
- Avoid cliché statements- Note being a first-generation student or having membership to an underrepresented group in higher education is not a cliché
- Keep the focus on you since you are applying to graduate school
- Be concise since you will have a strict word or page limit

My parents came to the United States as undocumented immigrants, and both began working as seasonal farmworkers in 2001. My parent's limited opportunities however did not cause them to lose faith in the value of education. From a young age, my parents instilled in me the idea of earning my education as a means of furthering my life beyond seasonal work. School became one of my favorite places. The teachers that I had throughout my public schooling were amazingly wise and thoughtful, but also held extremely high expectations for their students. They quickly became my role models and even though they were excellent teachers, not one of them represented my cultural background or that of my classmates. Since I lived along the U.S.-Mexico border, most of my peers were Latinx and spoke Spanish. It was not until high school that I was taught by my first Latinx, Spanish-speaking teacher, and that is when I decided to become an educator. When I began taking my teacher preparation courses in college, I became even more aware of this lack of representation within the public education system, which is why I now plan to pursue a Ph.D. in education with an emphasis on language and culture.

## Paragraph 1 – Education Field Example

# Paragraph 2 – Your relevant experience

- Opportunity to share your research experience
- Communicates knowledge gained and applied
- Showcases your skills and abilities
- You can nerd out and tell them what you know
- Illustrates how you stand out from other candidates
- Demonstrates that you are prepared for graduate school

# Paragraph 2 – Your relevant experience

Include the basics:

- Name your mentor, PI, lab, department, and project or paper name
- Briefly tell them about the project scope
- Talk a lot about your role in the project
  - What test or experiments did you conduct?
  - What analysis tools did you utilize?
  - What are the results?
  - Where did you present?
- As a transition you can tell them what this experience has led to...which goes into paragraph 3

# Paragraph 2 – Your relevant experience

- Dos

- Focus on the experience you are most knowledgeable and excited about
- Highlight experiences that show you are a strong candidate
- Name drop, tell them you are connected and who can vouch for you
- Use strong verbs to describe your actions
- Share challenges and discuss how you overcame them

- Don'ts

- Repeat everything on your CV
- Complain about your PI or others
- Embellish research results
- Spend too much time talking about the research, focus on you
- Forget to connect the past experience to the present or future interests/goals

## Paragraph 2 – Social Sciences Example

# Writing strategies

Clear and focused paragraphs

One central idea – Strive for depth rather than breadth

Use formal, academic language with strong vocabulary

Add sentence variety: simple and complex sentences

Use descriptive details

Use active voice

Use strong verbs

Be direct and concise

Avoid fluff and wordiness

Proofread!!!



# Paragraph template

Hook – attention grabber

Main claim – follow up with a sentence that sets the tone

Evidence – Use concise and direct language that details the purpose of the topic

Roadmap – Use a transition sentence with key words signaling directionally to the next main idea of the next paragraph

# Paragraph structure

## The beginning

- State a single topic
- Main point of your paragraph
- Topic sentence

## The middle

- Concrete examples
- Descriptive detail
- Evidence to support the main point

## The end...

- Explains how the example relates to the main point
- Connects the main point to the next idea
- Transition, connecting ideas to each other

# Brainstorm & Free Write

Using these questions brainstorm, free write, or outline your ideas for paragraph 1 & 2

- Thinking about your future, what has helped you land here?
- What was your a-ha moment?
- What was a pivotal experience that put you on this path?
- What was your experience like conducting research?
- What did you learn?
- How did you apply yourself?

# Knowledge Check

What is one thing you learned today?

# Questions?

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