PERSONAL STATEMENTS

A personal statement is a statement of your ideas and goals. Some programs request one or two paragraphs, while others require longer essays in which you will write at length about your preparation and motivation for graduate study. Before writing, consider what your reader might be looking for. Study the program website.

* Get started early, preferably during the summer before application deadlines. A first draft can take a month to create.
* Review suggestions from [Writing & Speaking Tutorial Services](http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial_center/writespeak/Admissions.htm).
* Have your statement critiqued by faculty, [career counselor](http://www.ncsu.edu/career/quicklinks/staff.php) or Tutor.

There are two main approaches to organizing an essay. You can outline the points you want to cover and then expand on them, or you can put your ideas down on paper as they come to you, going over them, eliminating some, and moving others around until you achieve a logical sequence. Making an outline will probably lead to a well-organized essay, whereas writing spontaneously may yield a more inspired piece of writing. Use the approach you feel most comfortable with.

If an institution requests autobiographical information, it does not have to be arranged chronologically. Your goal should be a clear, succinct statement showing that you have a definite sense of what you want to do and enthusiasm for the field of study. Your essay should reflect your writing abilities, revealing the clarity, the focus, and the depth of your thinking.

Admissions committees evaluate a number of things about you from your statement.

* Motivation and commitment to a field of study.
* Interest in a particular institution.
* Expectations of the program.
* Writing ability.
* Research or work experience.
* Educational background.
* Immediate and long-term goals.
* Maturity.
* Personal uniqueness - what you would add to the diversity of the class.

A critique is always helpful – especially from those writing recommendations and who are in your field. They will know what to stress and what to keep brief. Do not be surprised if you get differing opinions. In the end, only you can decide on the best way to present yourself.

If you need to explain anything that could be construed as negative in your application (low grades or low test scores, for example), you can do this briefly on a separate sheet of paper titled "Addendum" which you will attach to the application. Do not address this in the statement; keep the statement positive.

… an excerpt from Peterson's Graduate & Professional Schools guide.