



The Personal Statement

Getting into graduate school is more competitive than ever. You may have top marks, speak three languages, hold a patent, and play varsity soccer, but these accomplishments won't cut it if you drop the ball on your personal statement. This is the first time the admissions committee gets to learn who you *really* are (beyond the bullet points in your resume) so don't underestimate its importance.

The personal statement falls into two categories: General & Comprehensive and Very Specific. You will usually find the former in the Personal Comments section of the standard medical school application. It is also the type of question that law school applicants choose to answer. The latter is typical for business schools and other specialized programs.

BEFORE YOU START WRITING

- Self-reflect: there is a universal theme when it comes to admissions at the top schools. The committee wants to know *who* you are, not what your *credentials* are.
- Ask specific questions:
 - About Yourself
 - What is special, distinctive and impressive about your life story? Think about what makes you/your family unique, notable accomplishments, atypical obstacles that you have conquered, and people/events that have shaped your timeline. *Tip: If you decide to write about a problem of any sort, maintain a positive and reflective tone*
 - Which personal characteristics do you have that make you **a)** particularly well suited for this program/field, and **b)** that would improve your success in this program/field? Prove it!
 - What makes you a stronger and better candidate for Program X than the other applicants?
 - About Your Field of Interest
 - When did you first become interested in this field and why?
 - What have you since learned about this field and yourself that has further reinforced your interest and conviction that this is the path you want to take?
 - Don't Forget to Mention
 - Are there any gaps/discrepancies in your academic record?
 - What are your career goals, and how do they fit into the program?
 - What are *the* most compelling reasons you can give the admissions committee to accept you?

YOU'RE READY TO START

- You may be thinking: "The instructions didn't include a page length! What do I do?" Aim for approximately 500 words, or two pages double spaced. Put your first and last name in the header (right hand side, with the page number starting on the second page)
- Tell a Story: don't fabricate something, but weave a yarn that draws the reader in. No matter if your life is dramatic or not, you must find an angle that differentiates you from other applicants. *Tip: Focus on your opening paragraph*
- Review your entire life history. Reach out to friends, family, mentors, professors, etc. to ensure that no stone is left uncovered. And, then, be selective.



THAYER SCHOOL OF
ENGINEERING
AT DARTMOUTH

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BEFORE YOU PRESS SEND, REVIEW THIS CHECKLIST:

- ☐ I did not write what I *think* the admissions committee wants to hear.
- ☐ I did not send superfluous, supplementary material.
- ☐ I did not discuss high school experiences nor accomplishments, unless they are extraordinary.
- ☐ I avoided controversial subjects, unless they are relevant to the program.
- ☐ I described how I will contribute to the program in a way that will leave an impression.
- ☐ I did not list a series of trite strengths (e.g., “I am detail orientated, organized, and can multitask.”)
- ☐ I thought critically about where I’m applying and why. I considered what the school represents to me (i.e., a small university nestled in the woods versus a city school are two very different entities).
- ☐ I answered the question.
- ☐ I know myself. No one else could have written this statement.