

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

A personal statement (or statement of purpose) is an essay, cover letter, or question response required for academic applications. It presents a story of the applicant's academic motivations and career while exhibiting their unique qualities. In it, an applicant expands on the information in their resume or CV.

For more information on what a personal statement is and some of the criteria you should pay attention to as you write, see the [What is a Personal Statement?](#) handout on our website.

BRAINSTORM: DECIDING WHAT TO INCLUDE

Start with a brainstorming session to create a list of ideas that might be important to include in your personal statement. Know that this can be a difficult process, so if you feel frustrated, you are not alone. Give yourself lots of time to think about your answers to the below questions and have a place to write down and save everything you think of. (You do not need to use it all, but it is better to have more details than to have forgotten something!)

Because not all programs are the same, it is also very likely that you will need to write a different personal statement for each application. Brainstorming and saving that master list of ideas can make creating multiple personal statements easier.

To brainstorm, consider the following questions:

- Why are you applying?
 - ☞ What makes you interested in this subject matter and why is this school the place for you?
- What qualities do you want to demonstrate?
 - ☞ 2-3 skills that make you the perfect candidate for this program/discipline
- What experiences have shaped these qualities?
 - ☞ Specific events that show growth through effort over time
- How does this opportunity achieve your long-term goals?
 - ☞ Your plans for the future

Note: It is beneficial to do some research of the program before writing in order to link your goals and qualities to the focus of the program and the courses it offers.

CONTACT US:

(702) 895-3908 | writingcenter@unlv.edu
unlv.edu/writing-center



ORGANIZE: ARRANGE YOUR CONTENT EFFECTIVELY

Whether your document has one or more paragraphs, include an introduction, body and conclusion:

Introduction

- Provide an interesting hook (anecdote, slight humor, etc.) to engage the reader
- State your intentions for participating in this program/discipline
- Provide a clear thesis that answers the question(s) or sets a theme for the rest of your statement

Body

- Describe relevant, impactful experiences that have shaped your values and goals
- Demonstrate your qualities and how they contribute to the specific program/discipline
- Establish credentials that make you prepared for this program/discipline
- Show critical thinking by pointing out gaps in the subject/industry and your plans concerning them

Conclusion

- Reiterate how your qualities make you the perfect candidate
- Express your enthusiasm for this opportunity
- Highlight your goals and point to the future

GENERAL ADVICE

Concentrate on your opening paragraph

Application committees read a ton of essays. It's important to start strong: Catch their attention with a creative style or unique piece of information so they remember you in a positive light.

Get organized

Give each paragraph a clear topic sentence so that readers can skim and glean the main points.

If your personal statement is longer than one paragraph, have one overarching idea/topic in each body paragraph. For instance, one paragraph might focus on previous education, one on internship experience, and one on future goals. Mixing several topics in paragraphs might cause confusion for the reader or cause important information to get lost among too many details.

Have examples to show, not tell

In the second sentence below, the applicant demonstrates their compassion through a real-life example: discussing what they accomplished, what they learned, and how it affects the world around them.

Telling: ...it was not until I observed the emotional pounding the people of New Orleans had experienced that I developed a greater sense of compassion for their plight.

Showing: ...actually building homes and interacting with the locals, like 9 year-old Jermaine, who cried as I held his hand while we unveiled his rebuilt home, taught me that caring for people was as much about lifting spirits as making physical improvements.

Employing this strategy will provide a more compelling story that shows what influenced you to pursue a particular career and the qualities you have to offer. Choose your examples wisely!

Avoid clichés

Try not to include phrases or opinions that are very common or stereotypical.

Cliché: I want to be a physician because **I want to help people who are sick.** It would be an honor to serve people in need.

Unique: **As a woman with PCOS,** I want to become a gynecologist so that I can provide other young women a better understanding of and comfort in their bodies.

To ensure that your statement is authentic to you, incorporate aspects of your personal background that explain why you are drawn to a particular field of study and how it motivates you. Additionally, use this insight to describe the methods you plan to use in the program you are applying to.

Be concise

You only have a short amount of space to cover a lot of information, so you will need to be as concise as possible. Concision can occur both within the personal statement and in the whole application packet.

To be more concise in the personal statement, cut out any redundancies and filler words, and examine every sentence to see if every word is necessary or if you can rearrange your language to cut out excess words. Look especially for adjectives and adverbs, passive voice construction, use of the word “very,” and “which”/“that” phrases.

Original: Writing is being used by very attentive students as a tool to more clearly think through their ideas, which then helps them also better organize their thoughts.

Concise revision: Students use writing as a tool to identify and organize their ideas.

Since most applicants will need to submit multiple documents, such as a resume or transcript, information that is clearly mentioned in another document does not usually need to be repeated in the personal statement. The personal statement is where you can go in depth into one, or a select few, experiences or goals. Try not to cover too many ideas because you will not be able to discuss them completely.

Avoid generalizations

To help you be concise and keep the focus on your story, avoid generalizations. Phrases like “all biology students dream of going to medical school” or “since the beginning of time, educating children has been important for the development of society” do not say anything meaningful about your goals or experiences. These types of phrases might also be inaccurate (since not all biology students want to be doctors), not provable (you have no evidence that the very first humans were interested in educating children), or unclear (which society are you talking about?).

Balance professional and personable language

To maintain professionalism, use formal, concise language and a logical organization. Using phrases such as “will/is” over “would/could” will also convey a confident, direct tone and show that you are dedicated to the program.

Keep your personal statement personable by knowing your audience, demonstrating a passion for your goals, and using examples that show you as a person, student, and future member of the field. You can also

use active voice and “I” throughout the document to help your readers connect to you—and that can also help to be concise!

Tell your story

Friends, family, and mentors can be influences, but the focus must be on you as the main character. Reflect on your experiences to help you select the best personal examples to share.

Do not lie or exaggerate your experiences

Not only is it unethical to lie, by writing truthfully it is often easier to write concisely, avoid clichés, and be more personable. No other applicant is like you, and you want your own unique passions and skills to come through to the readers.

Writing is rewriting: revise, revise, revise!

A good personal statement might occasionally be written in one draft. A great personal statement will take multiple drafts and lots of revising. Give yourself plenty of time to work on it and find a variety of readers to give you feedback.

You and they can use the checklist below when reading the personal statement to see if there is something you have forgotten to address or could cover more fully.

REVISION CHECKLIST:

- Did you answer the prompt(s) or address the theme(s) the program asked you to?
- Does your statement include specific details about the program/discipline?
- Have you clearly demonstrated your qualities?
- Did you tell YOUR story?