

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.

TWO TYPES OF PERSONAL STATEMENTS

The general, comprehensive personal statement

This kind of statement allows maximum freedom to write a complete but relevant overview of the applicant's experiences. The applicant sets the theme and chooses specific information to promote their character.

The prompt-based personal statement

This kind of statement answers one or more specific questions from an institution, and evaluates particular qualities of the applicant. The guided prompt(s) assign a theme that outlines the focus for the applicant. Here is an example of instructions for the applicant to tell a particular story from their life:

Example prompt: Recount a time when you faced a challenge, failure, or setback. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

TWO TYPES OF SUBMISSIONS

In most disciplines, you will submit a personal statement to each school that is tailored to their program. However, some disciplines, such as law and medicine, expect students to submit one generic personal statement that will go out to all schools. How you submit your statement can impact the language you use.

Tailored: I believe the culturally sensitive research, service, and mentorship opportunities provided by the UNLV Couple & Family Therapy (CFT) program will allow me to assess diverse populations in the Las Vegas community.

Generic: A Clinical Psychology program will enable me to conduct research among different cultural contexts and obtain the interpersonal skills needed to assess diverse populations.

In the examples above, a tailored statement specifies how the elements of a particular program will help the applicant achieve their goals. A generic statement broadly presents the applicant's interest for a type of program.

CONTACT US:

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



PERSONAL STATEMENTS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

There is a particular style of rhetoric dedicated to each discipline that focuses on demonstrating content that readers will value. Here are some key distinctions of personal statements that are typically seen across the various fields of study, accompanied by keywords that are most often used and therefore the main topics covered.

Engineering

- Details experience and technical skills
- Key words: research, knowledge, design

Science/Medicine

- Many applicants are judged just from the opening paragraph
- Critical evaluation of skills and/or milestones
- Key words: research, knowledge, study, project

Business

- Details cultural/linguistic backgrounds
- Considers social and cultural issues that inspired applicant to pursue further study
- Key words: management, finance

Humanities

- Tells how an applicant's education training provides research skills and inspiration
- Details cultural/linguistic backgrounds
- Considers social and cultural issues that inspired applicant to pursue further study
- Key words: language, culture, literature

Social Science

- Tells how an applicant's education training provides research skills and inspiration
- Details cultural/linguistic backgrounds
- Considers social and cultural issues that inspired applicant to pursue further study
- Key words: social, research, communication

Remember that even when writing within conventions set for a particular discipline, applicants should write for a general audience and avoid using a lot of jargon.

For more information on how to write a personal statement, see the [Strategies for Writing a Personal Statement](#) handout on our website.