



## Tips for Writing a Graduate School Personal Statement

### General Information:

Graduate school applications generally request personal statements in one of two categories:

1. A general personal statement without specific questions to respond to
2. A personal statement answering specific questions to respond to

A *general personal statement* allows you the applicant a great deal of freedom in what you write about. To get you started, tips and topics for personal statements are suggested in this document.

A personal statement should be about one-to-two pages unless otherwise stated. Many graduate and professional programs give a specific word count. Ensure that you are following the application guidelines by following specific word count or page requirements. A personal statement should be fairly brief but a strong document to showcase your writing skills and your intent and future aspirations. Your personal statement gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your distinctive qualifications and desire to further your education in your chosen field. In doing this, you should focus on a few experiences as opposed to general ideas; concrete and specific examples create a more unique and impressive essay.

### Questions to Ask Yourself before Writing:

The main areas that you should address in your personal statement are your goals and motivations.

- What are your career goals?
- Why do you want to go to graduate school? - More specifically, why this program/field?  
*Acknowledging common interests that you have with program faculty helps to demonstrate your compatibility with the school(s) or program(s) you are applying for. You can do this by researching the program and the faculty members (their research and articles/books written).*

You want to let the admissions office know what makes you unique and impressive. To make your statement unique; you can use life stories and personal experiences.

- When did you become interested in this field?
- What first interested you and what about it continues to interest you?
- Have you overcome any usual obstacles or hardships?  
*In some cases, students may want to provide an explanation for poor academic performance (whether one semester or multiple). A short explanation describing a time of hardship or extenuating circumstances is okay; however, this explanatory statements need to be specific and concise (not an overstated justification).*

Describe your existing knowledge about the field and your skills.

- What have you learned about this field through classes, internships, work experiences, activities and/or volunteer jobs?  
*Proving your career maturity and passion for a particular career field through proof of experience is very important.*
- What skills do you possess?  
*Communication, leadership, management, analytical, interpersonal, etc.*



## Personal Information:

1. Unless otherwise asked, you are not obligated to provide personal history in your personal statement; however, insight into why you want to pursue further education is very important.
2. In providing personal information,
  - Be highly selective in your use of it (not too much or too little; be appropriate and relevant). *Information pertaining to your age, race, disability, gender, national origin, religion, family, or relationship issues would be considered inappropriate.*
  - Be confident in sharing your accomplishments but not conceited
  - Share your goals and aspirations as well as your successes
3. Balance academic, leadership/extracurricular, work-related, and personal information
4. If you want to share additional relevant information but it does not fit into your personal statement, you may want to consider including a condensed resume or curriculum vitae. As stated earlier, your statement should only be about one-to-two pages (or as specified by the graduate/professional program); therefore, a resume can serve as an additional tool to show your experience, education/training and any additional personal information.
5. Take your time writing your personal statement. Do not write this in one night; review and revise multiple times and ask others to critique. Your personal statement should be reflective and well written as this is a sample of your writing ability.

## Do's & Don'ts for Your Personal Statement: (adapted from [www.accepted.com](http://www.accepted.com))

- Do** create an outline and organize your thoughts before beginning your essay.
- Do** have a thesis or main point you want to communicate. This gives your essay unity and flow.
- Do** use specific examples to illustrate and support your point.
- Do** discuss your interests and use language that expresses passion.
- Do** start your essay with a unique and creative lead.
- Do** end your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
- Do** review and revise your essay multiple times. It should be very well-written with no typos.
- Do** have others critique your essay (career counselor, professor, friend, parent, etc.).
- Do** use page numbers and headers and footers with your last name.
  
- Don't** include irrelevant information and other information that does not support your thesis.
- Don't** start your essay with "I was born in..." or "My parents came from..."
- Don't** write your essay with a format of an autobiography, itinerary, or resume.
- Don't** try to be a clown; some gentle humor is okay in moderation.
- Don't** be afraid to start over if your essay does not sound right or is not answering the question.
- Don't** try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
- Don't** rely exclusively on spell check.
- Don't** provide generic statements (give specific examples).
- Don't** make things up.