

What is a personal statement?

Personal statements, or statements of purpose, should be interesting, insightful, revealing, and non-generic essays that suggest you have successfully gone through a process of careful reflection and self-examination. They also offer you an opportunity to:

- Provide a context for the rest of the information in your application
- Discuss your personal commitment to learning
- Talk about any special talent, creativity, leadership experience, or accomplishment
- Persuade the committee what personal qualities you will bring to the university
- List other information that is important for the committee to consider, including your tenacity and/or response to life challenges

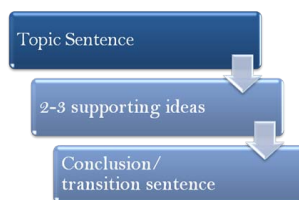
Types of Personal Statements:

1. **General, comprehensive personal statement** “allows the applicant maximum latitude in terms of what he or she writes.” Personal statements are common for “Personal Comments” sections of medical or professional school applications and many law school applications.
2. **Specific question responses** offer you less latitude in terms of content, but it is still possible and important to compose a well-written and persuasive response that holds the reader’s interest. This type of application essay is most common for business school, secondary medical school, and other graduate applications. Plan on answering anywhere from 3 to 8 essay questions.

No matter what type of application, always remember to read each question carefully, make every effort to understand it and respond to it, and remember that a personal statement is about you.

Helpful tips when writing:

- **Tell a story:** Do not fictionalize, but think of your own life and experiences as a type of story. Be fresh, lively, different—and articulate. Why? By distinguishing yourself through this story, you’ll make yourself memorable. This makes you stand out above the rest.
- **Before you write, brainstorm!:** Break the question down into separate sections and have a sheet of paper for each part. Focus on one sheet at a time and come up with ideas that relate to that one topic. Anything goes during this step, even if you don’t use it in the final product. If the question is vague, create three sheets to represent your past (impactful events that triggered your interests to pursue a specific area), present (what are you doing now to reach your goals or enhance your knowledge), and future (should you be accepted, what will do during and after your studies; long-term goals).
- **Organize your thoughts:** Now that you have several ideas, pick out the ones that stand out the most and/or ones that are related. Create an outline that includes 3-4 paragraphs (depending on your word/character limit). Every paragraph should have a topic sentence that summarizes and/or introduces what will be discussed in that particular paragraph. Underneath your topic sentence include related ideas from your brainstorming process. This diagram shows structure of paragraph:



- **Use jargon:** The specialized language of your discipline or profession, effectively: Indicate your familiarity with the vocabulary of your intended field, but avoid inflating your style such that you sound pretentious. Define terms and spell out acronyms that would be unfamiliar to your audience.
- **Be patient:** After completing your outline, begin writing the first of a series of drafts. Keep in mind, writing your personal statement is a process that will require multiple drafts before having a final copy that you can submit with your application.
- **Proofread:** Always read over what you have written before submitting. You may not see errors because you’ve been looking at the same thing for so long. It is helpful to have someone else look it over to give you an objective opinion and look for spelling and/or grammatical errors. The career advisers at the Office of Career Development can look over your statement and help you organize and brainstorm.

Common Questions:

1. Why are you specifically interested in attending this ____ school/program?
2. Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this it makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?
3. How do you fit in with the mission of this ____ school?
4. What volunteer activities or experience has led you to want to become a ____?
5. Is there anything you would like us to know about you or your academic record that you have not had the opportunity to describe elsewhere in this application?
6. Identify any traits, experiences, challenges, interests, etc. that a professor or advisor would not normally know about you and that you have not already written about in your application.

Common Mistakes:

- Not reading the instructions in the application
- Reiterating information listed elsewhere in the application
- Pretending to be the “ideal” applicant
- Careless errors from lack of proofreading
- Rambling, unfocused thoughts, and/or redundancy
- Listing accomplishments without explanation or detail
- Being overly humorous, wordy, self-deprecating, or glorifying
- Using gimmicky writing techniques, such as poems and quotes or using clichés
- Writing more about an inspirational person than yourself (e.g. your mother)
- Using vague generalities or writing about sensitive topics
- Exceeding the total maximum length
- Lack of transition words and flow

Common Transition Words/Phrases

not only ... but also
as a matter of fact
in addition
coupled with
in the same fashion
first, second, third
last
in the light of
not to mention
equally important
by the same token
again
also
another
identically
moreover
as well as
together with

of course
likewise
comparatively
correspondingly
similarly
further/furthermore
additionally
besides
finally
next
in contrast
although
on the contrary
at the same time
in spite of
be that as it may
instead
whereas

despite
however
nevertheless
regardless
besides
as a result
in that case
for this reason
thus
hence
since
consequently
therefore
accordingly
in other words
in order to
if...then
due to