



Writing your Personal Statement

Graduate and professional schools often require some sort of written statement -- often called a "statement of purpose," "personal statement," or "letter of intent"-- as a part of the application. Some statements require rather specific information--for example, the applicant's intended area of study within a graduate field. Still others are quite unstructured, leaving the applicant free to address a wide range of matters. The importance of the statement varies from school to school and from field to field. Once you have written one statement, you may find you can use parts of it for other statements or you may have to create an entirely different one.

DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE IN WRITING THE STATEMENT

Usually the purpose is to persuade the admissions committee that you are an applicant who should be chosen. Whatever its purpose, the content must be presented in a manner that will give coherence to the whole statement. Pay attention to the purpose throughout the statement so that extraneous material is left out. Pay attention to the audience (committee) throughout the statement. Remember that your audience is made up of professionals in their field, and you are not going to tell them how they should act or what they should be. You are the amateur, and ready to learn from experts in your chosen discipline or area of study.

YOUR APPROACH AND STYLE OF THE STATEMENT MATTERS

- Be objective, yet self-revelatory. You can write directly in a straightforward manner that tells about your experience and how it has influenced you. You can also take a more creative approach and integrate your main point into an essay that reflects your uniqueness.
- Form conclusions that explain the value and meaning of your experience, such as what you learned about yourself and your field and your future goals. Draw your conclusions from the evidence your life experience and academic opportunities have provided.
- Be specific. Document your conclusions with specific instances.
- Get to the point early in the statement and catch the attention of the reader.
- Limit its length to two pages or less. In some instances, it may be longer, depending on the school's instructions. Do not go over the word limit if one is stated.

THE CONTENT OF YOUR STATEMENT IS CRUCIAL

Be sure to answer any questions fully. Analyze the questions or guidance statements for the essay completely and answer all parts. Usually graduate and professional schools are interested in the following areas, although the form of the question(s) and the responses will vary:

- Your purpose in graduate study. Know why you want to learn more about a specific discipline, how you became interested in the field and what you hope to gain from in-depth learning.
- The area of study in which you wish to specialize. Know enough about the field so you can state your experiences and preferences using some of the language specific to the discipline.
- Your intended future use of your graduate study. Include your career goals and plans for the future, although it is OK to state you are currently uncertain regarding an exact career.
- Your unique preparation and fitness for study in the field. Correlate your academic background with your extracurricular experience to show how they unite to make you a special candidate. If you conducted research, state what it involved and the professor who supervised you (“Under the direction of Professor Anderson I ...”).
- Any problems or inconsistencies in your records or scores, such as a semester with poor grades. Your explanation should be followed by a positive statement of your abilities or your recovery. In some cases, it may be best to discuss this outside of the personal statement.
- Any special conditions that are not revealed elsewhere in the application, such as a significant (35 hour per week) workload outside of school. Be positive in any explanation about yourself.
- Research the school and describe its special appeal to you. Avoid stating reasons such as “wanting to attend a prestigious University” or “it is close to home”.

Above all, this statement should contain information about you as a person. You want to take this opportunity to give the reviewing committee a “window” into your personality, abilities and goals.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

- If you need some help figuring out what to write, make an appointment with your advisor, a faculty member, or the Center for Career Development to discuss the best approach.
- Once you have done a draft (or 2 or 3), show it to people you trust such as faculty, advisors or career development professionals, letter of recommendation writers, etc. The best people to review your statement are those who know your abilities in your chosen field, are knowledgeable about applying graduate school and have excellent writing skills.

For further information: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/02/>
<https://career.berkeley.edu/grad/gradstatement.stm>

Book: “Graduate Admission Essays” by Donald Asher, Ten Speed Press

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