

Applying to Graduate and Professional Schools

Preparing a Personal Statement

Most graduate schools require a personal statement as part of the application. This statement is often centered on your interests in the field, your personal background, the reasons you are applying to a particular graduate program, and your career and personal objectives. Although a well-written personal statement will not overcome poor grades or a low score on admissions tests, a poor one will surely hurt your chances of acceptance.

Plan and produce your personal statement as carefully as you would a crucial term paper. The following tips will help you produce an effective personal statement.

1. Your personal statement will require **several drafts**. **Be** prepared to write and re-write.
2. Before you begin your statement for each school, read as much as possible about their program so you can **tailor your statement** to the program and convince the admissions committee that you will fit well there. Many applicants will write that they want to attend a particular program at University X and emphasize research or professional interests that are not part of University X's program. Any selection committee immediately rejects such candidates. In the event that your personal statement is uploaded to a portal for multiple programs, create a broader statement.
3. Before you start, prepare an **outline of topics** you want to cover (e.g., professional objectives and personal background) and list supporting material under each main topic. Write a rough draft in which you transform your outline into text. Keep in mind: you may have specific prompts or questions that you will need to address in the application (as opposed to free form answers).
4. Check your **grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization** carefully. Nothing detracts from the content of a statement more than these types of errors. **Avoid slang words** that make you sound uneducated or informal, and overly elaborate words or stilted language that makes you appear pompous or pretentious.
5. Ask at least two of your advisors/instructors in addition to career services to read your first rough draft and offer feedback. Incorporate these suggestions into your second draft. Ask for another reading before preparing your final statement. **Consider the [Writing and Media Center](#)** for assistance in improving your work.
6. Your final statement should be as brief as possible – two double-space pages are sufficient (**check school guidelines** – some may have a character or word limit). Stick to the points requested by each program and **avoid lengthy personal or philosophical discussions**.
7. Explain your relevant experiences, but avoid turning them into events of cosmic proportion; remember that admissions committee members will likely ask you about items from your essays and resume/CV in the interviews. **Be honest, sincere, and objective** – this will show the evaluators that you take a mature, thoughtful approach to life.
8. You may want to **include some personal experiences or interests** that will incorporate your personality and motivations into your statement and make it more memorable for selection committees to read. Consult with a professor in your field or career services about how creative you can be with these examples.