



Advice for Writing Personal Statements

Content

<p>What should be in a personal statement?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic experiences 2. Relevant work and research experiences 3. Motivation for applying to graduate school 4. Reasons for applying to this specific graduate program 5. Long-term academic and professional goals 6. Relevant personal background <p>Address all aspects of a provided prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not ignore the prompt! • Selection committees will notice if you use the same template for multiple schools 	<p>Be creative (but provide context and relevance of everything included)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include personal experiences that apply to your graduate pursuits • Mention theorists or innovators (or other sources of inspiration) • Discuss an early influence that led to your career choice <p>A personal statement should be personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The personal statement is your interview on paper; this is your chance to provide the admissions committee with the most personal insight into who you are • Information you share should be as public as it is private; do not write about anything you are not comfortable sharing • If you write based on what you think the selection committee wants to hear, you risk losing authenticity
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Structure and Style

<p>Formulate specific long-term goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be wary of coming across as vague or, on the other hand, overambitious • Make honest self-projections, and do not invent for the sake of filling space <p>Begin and end with polished & moving sentences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Graduate Admissions Essays (book information in Resources section of this handout) for samples of successful first and last sentences <p>Illustrate that you are an informed applicant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your audience is well-versed in your discipline; speak to them, not the general reader • Appropriate use of jargon or discipline-specific language can show your familiarity and competence 	<p>Include a narrative or anecdote</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Captures the reader's attention • An excellent way to begin your personal statement • Makes you more vivid and personable as an applicant <p>Establish your intent early on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the first two paragraphs, succinctly provide your objective • Do not make your reader search for your purpose <p>Create an overarching theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you could leave your audience with only one phrase to describe yourself and your work, what would it be? This philosophy should encapsulate who you are (or who you want to be); weave this throughout the essay • Link your introduction and your conclusion (if possible) • This technique can be challenging and will take time to develop
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Revising

<p>Tailor your statement to the specific school or program to which you are applying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include anything that makes this program stand out, but do not simply copy from the university website; you must connect this information to yourself• Mention specific faculty members you hope to work with• You may need to significantly revise your essays if there are considerable differences between programs <p>Recognize that a successful personal statement involves a major time investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give yourself 3 months, MINIMUM• A polished, successful personal statement usually has undergone seven or more revisions• Do not be afraid to ask for help	<p>Final details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Needs to be completely free of spelling and grammar errors• Reread to check that you keep a positive tone throughout; simple changes, such as in the example below, are preferred<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ “I find it discouraging that many young adults do not participate in the political process”◦ “I hope that young adults will be inspired to participate in the political process”• Continually ask yourself while revising your personal statement: “Is this compelling?” and “Is this memorable?” <p>Find at least three readers to provide feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Someone who knows you personally• Someone who is able to comment on the writing aspects (i.e. Writing Center tutors)• Someone who knows you academically and is an expert in your chosen field (i.e. an academic advisor or a professor who knows you well)
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Resources

George Mason University Support

- **Career Services** is dedicated to career and graduate school preparation. Their website includes a timetable for the application process and resources for the application process as a whole: <http://careers.gmu.edu/students/gradschool/> SUB I, room 348

Recommended Books

- Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice by Donald Asher
- Writing Personal Statements and Scholarship Application Essays: A Student Handbook by Joe Schall
- FREE excerpt: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/u3w/WPSSample.pdf>
- How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School by Richard Stelzer
- Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way into the Graduate School of Your Choice by Donald Asher
- The Synonym Finder by J. I. Rodale

“The Paradox of Self-Expression: As you revise personal essays, concentrate on exuding an affirmative, positive tone. Be upbeat but not overbearing. Explain but don’t equivocate. Be realistic but not pessimistic. Speak confidently but don’t brag. Be idealistic but not naïve. Tell the truth about yourself and your background but don’t apologize for either.”

— from Joe Schall’s Writing Personal Statements and Scholarship Application Essays

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