

# HOW TO WRITE A STRONG PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL ADMISSION

Most graduate and professional schools require a personal statement as a component of the application process.

A compelling personal statement can help bring your application to the top of the admissions pile. Below, we've outlined what you need to know about crafting a personal statement to make your application shine.

## WHAT IS A PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The point of a personal statement is for the admissions board to gain a deeper understanding of who you are apart from your education and work experience. It explains why you're the right fit for the program and a worthwhile applicant. It's also an opportunity to highlight important factors that may not be readily available in the rest of your application.



## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Before you start crafting your essay, there are a few prompts you can ask yourself to help clarify what you want to accomplish.

- What are the key points you want to communicate about yourself?
- What personal characteristics or skills do you have that make you a strong candidate for this field?
- What exactly are your career goals, and how does graduate school help you reach them?
- What have you learned about this field already? When did you first choose to follow this path, and what do you enjoy about it?
- What do you think is important for the admissions board to know specifically about you?
- Are there any discrepancies or causes for concern in your application you need to address? For example, is there a career and schooling gap, or a low GPA at one point? This is the time to discuss whether a personal hardship may have affected your academics or career.
- Have you dealt with any unusual obstacles or difficulties in your life? How have they affected and shaped you?
- What sets you apart and makes you unique from other graduate school applicants?
- What factors in your life have brought you to where you are today?

## TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A GRADUATE SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT

**Follow the provided prompt.** While some prompts are quite open-ended and simply provide you with space to speak about yourself, your interests, and your fit for a program, other prompts ask you specific questions. Be sure to address the prompt within your answer as the readers will downgrade your answer if you avoid answering the prompt.

**Pick a few points to emphasize about yourself.** Introduce yourself to the admissions board. Select key factors about your background that you want the university to know – elements that reveal your character and demonstrate why you're a strong candidate for the school and field of study. Avoid simply re-stating course lists and activities if they can be found in other components of your application.

**Be very specific.** A personal statement is all about communicating what distinguishes you from other applicants. To accomplish that, you need to share specific anecdotes that underscore your statements. If you say you're a strong leader, present an example of a time you've proven that skill through work, school or your personal life. These specific, personal stories provide a deeper understanding of who you are and prove your intentions.

**Do your research.** Demonstrate what attracted you to the program. If there is a specific faculty member or class that caught your attention, or another aspect of the program that greatly interests you, convey it. This shows you've truly researched the school and have a passion for the program.

**Address any gaps or discrepancies.** Explain any factors that may have impacted your academic career. If an illness or any other personal hardship affected your grades or work, discuss them. If there is a discrepancy between your grades and your test scores, you can also take the time to go over any extenuating circumstances.

**Strike the right tone.** While it's important to give readers a glimpse of your personality, avoid oversharing or revealing intimate details of your life experiences. You should also avoid making jokes or using humorous cliches. Maintain a professional tone throughout your writing.

**Start strong and finish strong.** As with any piece of writing, you want to draw in your readers immediately. Make sure to start off with an interesting and captivating introduction. Similarly, your conclusion should be a well-written, engaging finish to the essay that highlights any important points.

**Proofread, proofread and proofread again.** We can't emphasize enough the importance of rereading your work. Your personal statement is also an analysis of your writing skills, so ensure you have proper grammar and spelling throughout. In addition, we recommend having multiple people look over your statement before submission. They can help with the proofreading (a second person always catches a mistake the writer may miss), give advice about the statement's structure and content, and confirm it's the proper recommended length. Your faculty mentors and advisers, a writing tutor at the Tutoring-Learning Center, and a Career Coach in the Academic and Career Advising Center are some of the resources that can review and provide feedback on your draft statements.

*\*Source: Adapted from an article written by Becca Van Sambeck, 2021.*