

# WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

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Your graduate school application usually includes your résumé / CV, transcript, letters of recommendation, test scores and a personal statement. When considering the topic of your personal statement, consider what the reader does not yet know about you from all the other pieces of your application.

## There are two common types of statements:

- ▶ The general, comprehensive personal statement: This allows you maximum freedom with what you write and is the type of statement often prepared for standard medical or law school application forms.
- ▶ The response to very specific questions: Often, business and graduate school applications ask specific questions, and your statement should respond specifically to the question being asked. Some business school applications favor multiple essays, asking for responses to three or more questions.

## Questions to ask before you write:

- ▶ What's special, unique, distinctive and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- ▶ When did you become interested in this field, and what have you learned about it (*and about yourself*) that has stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well-suited to this field?
- ▶ How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences or conversations with people already in the field?
- ▶ What are your career goals? How will this program help you reach them?
- ▶ Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial or physical) in your life?
- ▶ What evidence can you give that you are a strong candidate for graduate school? What will make your successful?
- ▶ Are there faculty members who are studying a research topic that interests you or have experience in?

## Writing Tips

- ▶ Tell a story. Show through concrete experience. Don't bore the admissions committee. If your statement is fresh, lively and different, you will distinguish yourself through your story.
- ▶ Be specific. Don't state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to pursue this field should be the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.
- ▶ Concentrate on your opening paragraph. The opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement. Sometimes you need to write it last, after you have written your the rest
- ▶ Avoid clichés. A medical school applicant who writes that he/she is good at science and wants to help other people is not exactly expressing an original thought. Stay away from often-repeated statements.
- ▶ Avoid certain subjects. Experiences or accomplishments from high school or earlier are generally not a good idea, nor are potentially controversial subjects (such as religious or political issues).

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- ▶ Do your research. If you want to demonstrate why you chose to apply to a specific school over another, do some research to find out what sets your choice apart from other programs. If the school setting would provide an important geographical or cultural change for you, this might be a factor to mention. Also consider specific faculty, curricular highlights or program offerings that attract you.
- ▶ Write well. Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Ask Career Services, the Writing Center, and your professors to review it. Many admissions officers say that good writing skills and correct use of language are important to them as they read these statements.

Adapted from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>.