



Graduate School Personal Statement

The personal statement is a chance for your graduate program to get a feel for you as a person and as a student. This guide is designed to give you tips about how to craft a personal statement that both describes yourself while also meeting the personal statement criteria that graduate school admissions committees are looking for. The statement is your opportunity show how you stand out from other applicants.

General Things to Consider...

- **The question/s being asked.** Some schools ask for a general, comprehensive statement while others may pose specific questions.
- **Who will read your statement.** Your statement will most likely be read by professors within that department. So, write as if your audience is a group of professorial and intellectual peers you wish to join.
- **What makes you unique.** This is a chance for you to tell the committee something about yourself that may not be evident from your transcripts, test scores, and recommendations.
- **Why you've chosen this specific program.** The professors will want to know what it is about their particular discipline or research that has drawn you to apply.
- **How this program will further your professional goals.** Be specific here. Avoid writing vague premonitions about how graduate school will help you “find yourself.” Instead, explain your specific professional goals that this graduate program will help you attain and how.
- **How your admission is compelling.** This statement is an opportunity to let the admissions committee know why you are a great fit for their particular graduate program.

Some Do's...

- **Do** answer the question being asked.
- **Do** tailor different statements for each program you may be applying to.
- **Do** write with confidence. Stand by your statements by not focusing on weaknesses or explaining them away. Allow the committee to hear your voice.
- **Do** some research on the program you're applying to. It can help to know the types of work certain professors are doing and why you're interested in working with them.



- **Do** make your statement interesting. If you're bored by how you've described yourself then the committee will be too.
- **Do** include the interesting parts of your life and how they've prepared you for your program.

Some Don'ts...

- **Don't** use clichéd language. Statements like “it has always been my dream” or “I want to make a difference” are worn out and overused.
- **Don't** begin your statement with a quote. A quote sends a message of “someone has already said it better” and the committee may be less inclined to take you seriously.
- **Don't** write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear. Pandering to a program's “sterling reputation” will be seen for what it is.
- **Don't** dwell on negative experiences. The committee already knows your grades and most likely isn't interested in a drawn-out sob story.
- **Don't** overlook any grammatical or spelling errors, at all. This is an immediate red flag that an applicant may not be committed to detail.

Organization

Introduction

- The writer should use the first sentence to grab the reader's attention or provoke thought. This is called the hook or opening statement.
- The introduction could discuss the writer's motivation to study a particular topic and commit to a professional path. Find a segue to your background in the field.
- Use statements following the opening sentences to briefly explain and support the desires expressed in the first sentence.

The Body

- Here is where a writer will go into strong detail providing evidence that supports statements made in the introduction.



- Topic sentences begin paragraphs by introducing the theme of the paragraph. A paragraph should reach a resolution statement that allows for a transition to the next paragraph. This will help the statement flow.
- Consider writing about specific courses and professors you have had, especially if the professors are well-known in their area of research.
- Go into detail about any extracurricular activities as they relate to your desired field of study. Also, be sure to mention any publications you have, if applicable, or collaborative research activities and presentations you have given.

Conclusion

- Reiterate why you are choosing this particular graduate school and consider mentioning one or two professors you look forward to working with and why.

Example

Here's an example of a typical opening that could be improved:

- ⇒ “I am applying to the Ph.D. program in History at Bulfin University because I believe that my historical research will flourish at your program since it is a department that will challenge me as I develop my historical research skills.”

The professors know why you're applying to their program because everyone else is applying for the same reason. Will the above opening statement command the attention of a group of professors sifting through hundreds of applications? Compare this opening with the following example:

- ⇒ “When I was thirteen, my Uncle Peter passed away and left me something that altered my life: his lockbox of maps, journals, photos, and other materials from his time serving as a gunboat captain in the Vietnam War. Ever since that day I have been fascinated with finding and interpreting new primary source material about the Vietnam War.”

The above is much more specific and personal. It tells the admissions committee so much more about the applicant's personal story and desires. It uses a passionate hook and uses language and experience to show rather than tell.



Your personal statement should sell yourself to the admissions committee as being passionate about a particular subject, well-read, academically and personally accomplished, willing to take on challenges, capable of interacting in a collegial manner with academic professionals, able to dedicate oneself to research and a dissertation, and willing to be a strong representative of the program for the rest of your professional life.

Further Assistance: For more detailed help or if you have questions, visit the Writing Center located in the Lewis University Library or call 815-836-5427.