

CONSTRUCTING PERSONAL STATEMENTS

The personal statement is an opportunity to show that you are qualified to do the rigorous work required in graduate school and should address why you have selected a program and chosen career path. General statements are often prepared for standard medical school, law school, and schools that use the Centralized Application System (CAS) and these statements are broad and are used to apply to multiple programs. Some business and graduate school applications may ask specific questions which you must respond to (you may write about why you're interested in the program, your career goals, and demonstrate your strengths and achievements). Follow the prompts if available!

Step 1: Reflect first before you begin writing your statement. Consider these questions:

- What makes you a unique individual which sets you apart from other applicants?
- What personal characteristics and skills do you have that make you a strong candidate for this field?
- Who or what has influenced your decisions over the years?
- What are some encouraging words others have said to you or about you?
- What motivates you to do well?
- What work and/or college experiences led you to pursue your career direction?
- What have learned about yourself?
- What are some of your accomplishments (what are you proud about)?
- Consider your undergraduate research and coursework – refresh your memory about projects and courses.

Step 2: Now make an outline of key points that you will write about using ideas from above.

- Introduction: Think of how you will draw your reader in to learn about you as this is your first paragraph. Avoid cliched statements, quotes and Bible verses unless they specifically support your narrative.
- Body: This will be several paragraphs to support your interest in your chosen field. You will need to have detailed evidence to demonstrate your skills and accomplishments. Start a new paragraph when you are transitioning to a new idea.
- Conclusion: This is your last paragraph and will summarize the main points.

Step 3: Now starting writing. Edit. Write a second draft and edit. By a third draft ask a trusted editor to read it (like a faculty advisor, English professor, or career coach in Career & Professional Development). A few tips:

- Place your full name in the upper right corner and name your file document with your full name (Last name_first name_20xx Personal Statement).
- Follow the permitted length – do not exceed the maximum word count. Generally, it should not be more than two pages.
- Proofread for proper grammar and punctuation.
- Use scholarly or academic language. Yes, this is about you, but do not write casually.
- No whining or excuses – keep the overall tone positive.
- Did you demonstrate skills and qualities using stories? Were you specific and not shallow?

Adapted from *Graduate Admissions Essays* by Donald Asher (2012)