

General Guidelines for the Personal Statement

Use these points to help you write an effective personal statement.

Do...

1. Your homework. Research the school and/or program to which you are applying.
2. Brainstorm. Take a personal inventory: What makes you unique? What research have you conducted? What are your career plans? What should the admissions committee know about you? Write honestly about what interests and excites you.
3. Write a coherent, well-structured essay. Give your essay direction with a unifying metaphor or analogy.
4. Write an interesting essay. Start with an attention-grabbing lead – an anecdote, quotation, question, or engaging description of a scene.
5. End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead, or completes your metaphor or analogy.
6. Revise your essay at least three times, asking yourself these questions: Are my goals well articulated? Have I demonstrated my knowledge of the school and/or program? Have I answered the question(s) asked? Is my voice being heard?
7. Ask someone else to critique your personal statement.
8. Proofread your personal statement by reading it out loud, or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape.
9. Write clearly and succinctly.

Don't...

1. Don't summarize your entire life. Stay away from information that doesn't support your metaphor or analogy.
2. Don't start your essay with "I was born in..." or "My parents came from..." or "I've always wanted to be..." Avoid these hackneyed statements and clichés altogether.
3. Avoid listing. Don't simply reiterate your resume. Pick and choose two to four main qualifications to focus on.
4. Don't try to be funny. Gentle humor is okay, but you don't want to risk that the admissions committee won't get the joke.
5. Don't write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear. Be honest and yourself.

6. Don't emphasize the negative (low GPA, test scores) by giving weak excuses. Balance any weaknesses by also emphasizing your strengths.
7. Don't try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
8. Don't rely exclusively on your computer to check your grammar and spelling.
9. Don't make things up. Remember, the purpose of the personal statement is to allow the admissions committee to get to know YOU.