

Writing Personal Statements

For Graduate School and Scholarship Applications

These statements are extremely important! Be sure you take complete advantage of this opportunity to tell the admissions or awards committee why they should accept you.

Start a few weeks early, allow plenty of time for revision, and proofread carefully.

Types of Personal Statements:

1. General statements in which you write about yourself – the topic is relatively open
2. Specific essays in which the topic is assigned for you

For all types, you must remember to **read the question!** It sounds obvious, but it's something many people forget. Be sure you answer all parts of the question.

Tips for Writing a Personal Statement:

- Use a “hook” to get your reader’s attention and tie your essay together.
 - Good: “The first time I laid eyes on that chicken, I knew I had to be a poultry scientist.”
 - Bad: “I want to go to medical school because I want to be a doctor.”
- Show, don’t tell, what you are like as a person in a way that your resume never could.
 - Good: “Mentoring a troop of Girls Scouts taught me the value of patience...”
 - Bad: “I am smart and focused and perseverant and compassionate...”
- Try to stick to experiences from the recent past.
 - Good: “In my senior year at UCF, I had the opportunity to volunteer at...”
 - Bad: “In high school, I was on the debate team.”
- Use the statement to clarify black marks on your record or weaknesses in your record.
 - Good: “Unfortunately on the only day I could take the LSAT, I had the flu...”
 - Bad: “I could never get any work done because my boyfriend was always at my apartment.”
- Avoid controversial topics unless the question specifically asks for it.
 - Good: “In my coursework as a criminology student, I studied the issues of...”
 - Bad: “I support abolishment of the death penalty, a lower drinking age, and anti-gun laws.”

Bring your drafts to the University Writing Center! We can show you different strategies for proofreading effectively. Ask if the essay is cohesive, if your main point is clear, if your ideas flow smoothly, if you sound like a real person, if you have enough (but not too much) detail, etc.

Worksheet for Writing Personal Statements

- 1) What is unique about my background? What sets me apart from other candidates? Have I faced any unusual hardships? Which of these details has influenced my growth?

- 2) Which qualities about myself would I like to highlight? What evidence can I give that shows I possess these qualities?

- 3) When did I become interested in this field? What specific experiences (including work, volunteer, or academic experiences) have furthered this interest?

- 4) What are the requirements of my chosen field? What experiences have prepared me for the realistic aspects of this field?

- 5) What are my career goals? What do I want to do with my degree or scholarship money?

- 6) Which personal characteristics (i.e. skills, etc.) will enhance my prospects for success in graduate school and the professional world?

- 7) Are there any snags in my record or weaknesses in my application that need to be further explained?

- 8) What specific features attracted me to this particular graduate program (or scholarship)?