

Personal Statements

Personal statements for professional school (e.g., medical school, law school, nursing, etc.) often tell a personal story or relate your life experiences to why you want to pursue this field and why you are well-suited for it. Statements for other graduate programs aimed at research may ask you to detail your academic experience and interest in that discipline. Be sure to follow the prompt and check in with professionals and professors in that field to see what is expected for your statement.

Show vs. Tell

Provide select details to make a story more vivid or an experience more personal to you. Specifics are much more powerful than generalizing. Let your readers draw their own conclusions from your story or from your interests about what kind of doctor, lawyer, or scholar you would be.

Think About What You Are Signaling About Yourself to a Committee

What are committees looking for? Aside from intelligence, other qualities like maturity, independent thinking, a willingness to learn, humility, humor, kindness, and creativity can make you stand out. But don't just tell a committee you are these things, show it!

Avoid Clichés and Platitudes

Generic statements about success, hard work, being a team player, and leadership are never necessary. They won't make you stand out, and they waste precious space in a statement.

Avoid Mentioning Pre-College Experiences

Unless it's very significant or relevant, leave pre-college experiences for another paper. You want to come off as an independent and mature adult. (Some of the worst offenders involve "knowing" you've wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer since you were five years old –this is boring, and not convincing). Don't talk too much about your parents, either.

Keep the Statement About You

Diversify your sentences, so that they don't all start with "I." Additionally, talking about what you are interested in and what you value is also about you.

Be Careful with Hero Narratives and "Magical Moments"

You know it: the hero narrative where you overcame all obstacles or the magical moment when you were sitting in class, and all of the sudden nuclear physics made



sense. Most committees will be more impressed with your ability to learn and to reflect deeply than your ability to succeed. Magical moments can come off as just lucky, and they don't tell your reader anything about you as a candidate.

Show Your Statement to Expert Readers

Your friends and parents are not in the best position to give you advice (even if they know your field). Show your advisor and your professors (especially if they are writing you letters of recommendation) to make sure you are on the right track, and definitely bring your statement to the Writing Center for additional feedback.

Write Early and Revise Often

The most successful statements are substantially revised several times. It's a good idea to start writing these important documents weeks, if not months, in advance to allow time to get those expert readers and do significant revision.

Make an Appointment with a Writing Center Tutor

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