

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Most graduate school applications require personal statements, which are essays that address topics such as: the reasons for going to grad school, research interests, career goals, interest in that program, and/or specific topics or questions posed by the grad program. Personal statements are often used in lieu of an in-person interview, and therefore they may be the only way for graduate admission recruiters to get to know applicants outside of what is presented on a résumé and/or GPA or exam scores. Personal statements may also be called personal essays or a statement of intent.

General Characteristics of Personal Statements

The content of each personal statement you write can vary. Make sure to *carefully* read the application guidelines for each program you are applying to and understand what information each school wants you to include or discuss in your essays. Many times guidelines are provided, but there are occasions where the program wants a personal essay but no other instructions are given.

If guidelines are provided, make sure you answer each one of the questions or address the topics that are provided. Guidelines are usually provided on the program's application webpage. If you are unsure of the guidelines, contact the program to verify what they are looking for in personal statements.

If guidelines are NOT provided, there are general points that every personal statement should include:

- 1) Why do you want to go to graduate school?** Why is it important for you to obtain a post-baccalaureate degree? Show your passion and enthusiasm for the field of study.
- 2) Why do you want to go to *that* grad school?** What is it about that particular program that interests you? DO RESEARCH about the program or school and reference something unique or the research a faculty member is conducting, for example. Describe what you will gain or learn from being a student in the program.
- 3) What are your research interests?** Describe what you are intellectually curious about. What would you choose as a thesis or dissertation topic?
- 4) What do you have to bring to the table?** Put the "personal" in your personal statement. What makes you stand out from the other applicants? For example, discuss if you have done unique research or internships that directly relates to the field of study. Reference "soft skills" such as leadership, communication, initiative, time management, etc. you may have and how those skills will help you in the program.
- 5) What are your future career goals?** Outline how you hope to use your advanced degree after graduating from the program. Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

Personal Statement Check List

- ✓ Visit the graduate school application website to find out if a personal statement is required.
- ✓ Read the instructions provided and make sure to answer questions and/or discuss any topics in your essay. Also take note of any page or word count maximums.
- ✓ Write a first draft of your personal statement.
- ✓ Visit Career Services during drop-ins or make an appointment to meet with a professional staff member to have your essay critiqued for content.
- ✓ Make sure your essay is within length or word maximum/minimums provided in the guidelines. If no such guidelines are given, two pages double spaced is suggested.
- ✓ Bring your personal statement to the Writing Center to have it critiqued for grammar, spelling, syntax, etc. and continue editing.
- ✓ Submit your personal statements with your grad school applications.