**Writing Your Personal Statement**

Questions to ask yourself before you write:

* What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
* What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
* What are you interested in becoming and when did you become interested in this field? What insights have you gained while studying this field?
* What are your career goals? How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
* Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
* What personal characteristics (for example. integrity. compassion. persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
* What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?

Some Options for Starting

* Talk about someone who changed your life, or talk about some event that changed your life.
* Pick something you can write freely on
* Write the introduction last!
* The conclusion should be the anchor paragraph stating how you have changed.

### General Advice While Writing

Tell a story

* Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience. One of the worst things you can do is to bore the admissions committee. If your statement is fresh, lively, and different, you'll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself through your story, you will make yourself memorable.

Be specific

* Don't, for example, state that you would make an excellent doctor unless you can back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a lawyer, engineer, or whatever should be logical, the result of specific experience that is described in your statement. Your application should emerge as the logical conclusion to your story.

Find an angle

* If you're like most people, your life story lacks drama, so figuring out a way to make it interesting becomes the big challenge. Finding an angle or a "hook" is vital.

Concentrate on your opening paragraph

* The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab the reader's attention or lose it. This paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement.

Tell what you know

* The middle section of your essay might detail your interest and experience in your particular field, as well as some of your knowledge of the field. Too many people graduate with little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the profession or field they hope to enter. Be as specific as you can in relating what you know about the field. Refer to experiences (work, research, etc.), classes, conversations with people in the field, books you've read, seminars you've attended, or any other source of specific information about the career you want and why you're suited to it. Since you will have to select what you include in your statement, the choices you make are often an indication of your judgment.

Don't include some subjects

* There are certain things best left out of personal statements. For example, references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier are generally not a good idea. Don't mention potentially controversial subjects (for example, controversial religious or political issues).

## Personal Statement: Rules and Pitfalls

# Rules-

* Strive for depth rather than breadth. Narrow focus to one or two key themes, ideas or experiences
* Try to tell the reader something that no other applicant will be able to say
* Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experience
* Don't include controversial issues
* Provide the reader with insight into what drives you
* Be yourself, not the 'ideal' applicant
* Get creative and imaginative in the opening remarks, but make sure it's something that no one else could write. Tell what you know
* Evaluate experiences, rather than describe them
* Concentrate on your opening paragraph
* Proofread carefully for grammar, syntax, punctuation, word usage, and style
* Use readable fonts, typeface, and conventional spacing and margins

Pitfalls

* Do not submit an expository resume; avoid repeating information found elsewhere on the application
* Do not complain or whine about the "system" or circumstances in your life
* Do not preach to your reader. You can express opinions, but do not come across as fanatical or extreme
* Do not talk about money as a motivator
* Do not use boring clichéd intros or conclusions

*"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is..."*

*"This question asks me to discuss..."*

*"In sum, there are three reasons why you should like me..."*

* Do not use unconventional and gimmicky formats and packages
* Do not submit supplemental materials unless they are requested
* Do not incorporate technical language or very uncommon words; show off your vocabulary but don’t make your paper unreadable.