

Writing a Personal Statement

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is a document that is often used by colleges, universities, or scholarship foundations to assess the personal qualifications of applicants. Most personal statements ask the applicant to explain what makes them a desirable candidate. Although personal statements will vary in their requirements, many will ask you to include some or all of the following:

- **Personal characteristics**
- **Accomplishments**
- **Future plans and goals**
- **Educational and work experience**

A personal statement is a persuasive piece of writing. It is a supplement to your resume, transcripts, or application and its purpose is to provide prospective institutions specific details about you. Most of all, it is an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself from other applicants.

Dos and Don'ts

Do...

- Read the instructions or writing task carefully. It's important to know exactly what you should be responding to. You may also want to refer to the writing task after you have written to make sure you are on target.
- Approach the personal statement as an academic assignment. Because personal statements are representative of who you are as a student, treat them as you would an academic essay. That means, giving yourself ample time to write, drafting multiple revisions, and even getting a second opinion from a friend, tutor or instructor.
- Most importantly, even though it is more of a narrative than an essay, still use a formal, academic tone.
- Be specific. Often times, when we write about ourselves, we tend to be unintentionally vague because certain things are very apparent to us. However, consider your readers: they have never met you and will need very detailed information about you to understand who you are. Be very thorough when explaining past experiences or accomplishments and elaborate on anything that might confuse an outside reader.

Don't ...

- Focus on the negative. A personal statement is a great place to explain anything that may look questionable on your resume or transcript: a long absence from school, poor grades, etc. However, be delicate in how you approach negative subjects. Don't make excuses for them, but provide a reasonable explanation. Also, mention any positive outcomes or "silver linings" that arose despite these setbacks.
- Repeat information that appears elsewhere. A personal statement should sound like a narrative, not a laundry list of accomplishments. Do not simply repeat information that is found on your resume or transcript. Remember, this is a chance to stand out as an applicant and grab your

reader's attention. Address unique or memorable aspects about yourself that will show the audience why you are qualified.

- Lie or exaggerate. The pressure of competing with other students or a lack of confidence in your own abilities may tempt you to fabricate certain details about yourself. However, it's best to be sincere and honest in your writing, especially when writing about yourself. You don't want to risk being held accountable for false information or misrepresent yourself.

References and Useful Resources

Purdue OWL: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>

UC Berkeley: <http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/index.htm>

University of California: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-statement/index.html>