



Personal Statement

What is a personal statement?

A personal statement is usually a 2-to-3-page, double-spaced essay describing your experiences, interests, academic achievements, and future goals. It is your opportunity to vividly show off who you are by describing your talents, creativity, motivation, and values, which your grades alone do not show. A compelling personal statement can distinguish you as a student who will be an asset to the university community, especially if your test scores and grades put you in the “maybe” category for admission. Because the personal statement is such an important part of the admissions process, allow yourself 3 to 4 weeks to work on it.

Why do universities or benefactors require personal statements?

By emphasizing writing and thinking skills, the university demonstrates that its goal is not only to encourage your academic achievement, but also to develop your critical thinking abilities. Your goal is to present the committee with mental images of how and why you will be a successful student at the college.

What should you write about?

- **Meaningful experiences** – Describe times when you have learned something about yourself, other people, or another culture. Explain how your understanding will be an asset to the university community.
- **Challenges and hardships** – Explain how any personal demands, learning challenges, or major life changes have affected your academics. Describe how you overcame (or are learning to manage) these challenges.
- **Interests** – Demonstrate that you consistently contributed and committed to a few relevant activities, i.e. commitments to school, religious, or community activities. Do not list all of the activities that you have participated in. Instead, show how your interests have shaped who you are.

What should you NOT write?

- Things the people at the institution you're applying to already know about themselves: their national rankings, how prestigious they or their programs are, etc. Saying flattering things can seem insincere, especially when you're asking for something.
- Things that are obvious about you such as "I would be so honored to attend your university." Your application itself lets them know this.

How to draft a personal statement:

Step 1: Brainstorm

Brainstorming gives you a chance to develop a topic you feel passionate about. Use brainstorming to include details that relate to your ideas. Begin by considering the following questions:

- What are your major successes? What is your definition of success?
- What are your dreams for the future? How does college fit into your plans?
- What personality trait or skill distinguishes you from everyone else?
- What are your favorite books, movies, and music? How do they influence your life?
- What is a significant experience or achievement that has special meaning to you?
- What is an issue of personal, local, or national concern that is important to you?
- When do you feel the most alive and why?
- If you invited people from all parts of your life into the same room, what is one thing they would all agree you are good at?
- Are you interested in any kind of art (music, painting, writing, photography, gardening, etc.)? What do you like about the process of creating art?
- What future job, if you could get it, would excite you? Why would you feel excited?
- What are you doing when you have the highest regard for yourself? How will that activity/trait/belief help you succeed in the future?
- Do you have a hidden talent or deep desire that you think other people do not see in you?

Step 2: Choose a Topic

Most colleges suggest two or three topics and ask you to choose one. Focus on something that excites you, that you have strong feelings about, and/or that makes you who you are. If you have strong opinions about your topic, honestly write about what you believe; do not be afraid of controversy. No matter what your topic is, the essay should show your personality, values, thoughts, and goals.

Step 3: Compose a First Draft

- **Introduction** – An admission officer will spend 1-2 minutes reading your personal statement, so start your introduction with a concrete image of you or an experience that gets the reader's attention and keeps him or her reading.
- **Body paragraphs** – Introduce “snapshots” of you, your experiences, or your interests, using a logical sequence. Lengthy transitions are unnecessary, as long as the images are connected.
- **Conclusion** – The closing paragraphs should leave a strong, persuasive image of you contributing to the university's community or achieving your long-term goals. Unlike a traditional essay, you do not need to summarize ideas; instead, focus on leaving a positive impression.

Step 4: Revise and Edit

- **Revise your essay** – After you've finished a draft, take a break—a couple of days—before you begin to revise. You need to take a fresh look at the essay. Does it reveal who you are? Is it your best writing? Does it sound like you? Does it say what you want it to say? Has anything important about you been left out?
- **Add details** – **Make sure you use concrete examples to show your experience(s) and explain what you learned.**
- **Transition** – Connect your ideas and paragraphs with clear transitions.
- **Vary sentence length and structure** – Use “my” to describe your accomplishments, but do not use “I” as the subject of every sentence.
- **Active voice** – Use active, not passive verbs. For example, do not write, “A decision was made.” Instead, write, “Under my leadership, we decided . . .” or “I decided . . .”
- **Tone** – Present yourself as confident and successful, but not arrogant.
- **Get feedback** – Ask a teacher, Writing Lab tutor, friend, or parent to read your essay and see if your ideas are clear and flow smoothly.
- **Be prepared to revise again** – Consider the feedback you were given and read through your essay again with a critical view, the way a stranger would. After getting a reader's response, give yourself at least a day to revise and proofread before submitting your application.