



# Personal Statement



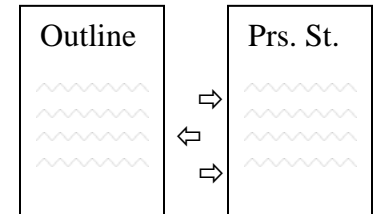
Career Center: 962-3174 (9/07)

## Purpose of a Personal Statement

A personal statement, also known as a statement of purpose, demonstrates your unique qualifications as well as your writing ability, creativity, and career goals. Admissions committee members are looking for interesting, insightful and non-generic personal statements.

### CREATE AN OUTLINE

Target your personal statement by gathering info about each grad program. Then, mirror their needs into your essay. You want the admissions committee to read every line of your statement and say, “This is exactly what we need!”



- Look at the department’s website (faculty interests, course outline, program description, etc.).
- Find **job descriptions** of positions in your field to determine what the grad program will be training you to eventually do. Also use ONET Online (<http://online.onetcenter.org/find>) to identify job tasks.
- See what your industry’s **professional associations** focus on.

### DEVELOP YOUR CONTENT

Possible Essay Topics:

- Your unique qualifications/skills for the specific graduate program (i.e. why are you a good fit?). You will need to research each program.
- Demonstrate that you can handle the work load, as well as the types of projects/activities.
- What do you find exciting about your field of interest? What have you done to develop these interests?
- Undergraduate classes/projects related to the program.
- Experiences (jobs, volunteering, extracurricular activities, conferences, etc.) or achievements relevant to your career choice or application to graduate school.
- Who or what has influenced your decision to pursue your field?
- Research interests and academic accomplishments/recognitions.
- What characteristics and skills do you possess that enhance your prospects for success?
- Is there anything that you need to explain? If so, show how it relates to the purpose of your essay but be careful not to make excuses.
- What are your short and long-term career goals? What motivates you to accomplish these goals?
- Explain special circumstances in your academic history (e.g., an unusually poor performance one quarter).
- Describe group activities that will show teamwork.
- What do you hope to contribute to the program?
- Answer any specific questions the application asks.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Don't write one general statement for all schools. Learn about each graduate program and clearly state reasons for pursuing a degree from that school. Demonstrate your knowledge of their program and then show that you are a good fit.
2. Go in depth on a few themes rather than just highlighting many (i.e. if you've done 100 relevant projects, describing them all wouldn't be enjoyable to read).
3. Provide specific examples of how your skills and knowledge match the graduate program's needs. Stress benefits for them, not you. Provide strengths that set you apart from other candidates.
4. Avoid sounding like everyone else (i.e. if you are going into a helping field, telling them that you want to help people is redundant). Show how you are different/better than other applicants.
5. Be professional; don't be a comedian or use cheesy sales lines. Use natural language in simple, clear sentences. Don't try to impress the reader with unusual vocabulary or complicated sentences. Have a positive tone, vary length and structure of sentences, and avoid clichés.
6. Avoid using the word "I" too much.
7. If you discuss a personal crisis, it should relate to the purpose of your essay. Mention how it affected your personal goals, perspective, or academic performance. Show how the personal crisis has played a part in your decisions about graduate school, but focus on the facts and the future. Be careful not to include graphic or irrelevant details.
8. Be positive; don't apologize. Your job is to convince the graduate program that you are qualified.
9. Avoid discussing potentially controversial topics (e.g., politics & religion), as well as preaching to the reader (assuming your ideas are right).
10. Proofread; using a spell checker is not enough. Make sure every word/phrase in your essay has a purpose and is adding value. Have a few others read and provide feedback on your essay.
11. Your essay should be an "interesting read". If your essay was the introduction to your novel, would they want to keep reading?
12. Read the application carefully and follow the instructions. Don't exceed word/page limits.
13. Keep a copy of your personal statement for future reference.