

## Writing Personal Statements and Graduate School Essays



A personal statement, statement of purpose, or a graduate school essay is typically a 1-2 page document that demonstrates to the selection committee who you are as a person. While your resume lists some of your work history, extra-curricular activities and accomplishments, your personal statement should demonstrate your personal characteristics and your passion for the field.

### Your audience:

- \* Your audience is typically a selection committee that is made up of faculty, students, and members of the community. Because of the wide variation in audience, you will want to make sure that your personal statement is both interesting and well written. If applicable, include personal stories to increase the interest factor, but remember, your personal statement is a formal document and should not include jargon or slang.
- \* In general, a selection committee is searching for candidates who are passionate and motivated to make contributions to the field. They are also looking for candidates who will be successful both in graduate school and the future.



### What the selection committee looks for:

- \* Sincerity – If your personal statement sounds contrived because you wrote what you think your audience wants to hear, you will most likely get downgraded because it is easy to tell that what is written is not the “real” you.
- \* Motivation and Commitment – Your reader wants to know why you are applying to graduate school and your future goals in the field. “My family wants me to apply” or “I want to make a lot of money in a secure field” is not enough. Show your passion!
- \* Writing Ability – Written communication is vital both in graduate school and your future work environment. Your audience needs to know that you can express yourself clearly and concisely in writing, so that they can feel confident you will be successful in the program.
- \* Personal Qualities – Your reader wants to know the “real” you, so emphasize your personal traits and qualities. Make sure that you use clear examples to back up your statements. Don’t just say that you are good with patients, talk about a time when you worked with a patient and the impact that the situation had both on you and the patient.

## **Common Mistakes**

- \* Careless errors – Grammar and spelling can make or break an essay and errors in your work shows that you do not care about the process. Have at least 3 people read your essay before submission. (Professors and career consultants at the CRC are great for this!!!)
- \* Vagueness – Speaking in generalities with no back up or examples will leave your audience feeling like you are all talk.
- \* Lack of flow – Make sure that your essay is well organized and transitions smoothly between paragraphs. Abrupt changes will distract your reader.
- \* Too much information – Your essays should be concise and to the point. Don't waste your reader's time with irrelevant information.

## **Choosing a Topic**

- \* Often times the school will give you one or two topic choices. In those cases, read the question carefully and make sure that your personal statement answers the question effectively.

## **Some questions to think about when brainstorming:**

- \* What are your future goals and how will this program help you reach them?
- \* Why do you want to enter the field?
- \* Why did you choose this program in particular?
- \* What personal or professional challenges have you overcome?
- \* Think about a time where you helped someone? How did this impact you and your goals?
- \* What types of academic, professional, or personal activities have you spent most of your time on in the last few years? How are these related to your goals?
- \* What personal qualities do you have that would make you successful in the field?
- \* What is most important to you and how do these values fit with your field of choice?
- \* What are some significant moments in your life that impacted your career/field choice?