

HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL STATEMENT

A personal statement is a short essay required as part of your application to an academic program. It may also be referred to as the admissions essay, statement of purpose, or letter of intent. In addition to helping committee members and faculty better understand your motivation for pursuing the career, you also have an opportunity to highlight your qualifications and provide a quality writing sample. Apply the following tips to enhance this important essay.

Identify the needs of your readers. To better understand the skills and qualities they value, research your profession and graduate programs. For example, medical schools will wonder about your compassion, in addition to your writing ability, stamina and reasons for entering the field. Gather information by reviewing publications of professional associations, accreditation agencies, O*Net or the Occupational Outlook Handbook. After you have completed this research, note the attributes desired in the first column below.

Next, engage in self-assessment. Reflect on your unique strengths and background. Then, carefully match these attributes to the qualities desired by the program or profession. Note in the second column below specific examples and evidence for each of the factors you identified in the first column. Draw from your scholarly, work, volunteer, co-curricular, research, or other experiences that have contributed to your professional development. Reference collegiate experiences instead of outdated high school achievements.

Quality Desired by Profession or Program	Evidence or Example that You Possess this Attribute

Find your focus. Identifying a theme or thesis will bring depth and structure to your essay. It is not enough to state that you want to help people or have wanted to enter the field since you were a little kid. You will lose your audience with these generic, vague clichés. Begin by brainstorming several possibilities that you can choose from later. Review your life experiences to identify powerful moments or challenges you have overcome. Reflect on your motivations for entering your chosen profession and the unique attributes you have that will contribute to your success. List numerous experiences and achievements. Describe your experience working or volunteering directly in the field. If you have not had these opportunities, highlight skills and experiences that are transferable. Reference leading scholars, current issues, and industry terminology. Initiate an exchange they want to continue. Demonstrating your intellect and interesting persona helps the faculty picture themselves conversing with you as an admitted student – as someone who has something to offer.

Create an outline. Rank the experiences you identified or place them in chronological order. This will help you identify the order in which you will present your ideas. Add supportive details under each, being sure to connect your stories specifically to your goals and fit for their program. Do not merely describe experiences. Speak to their value. What makes these events important, unique, or compelling? List possible introductions and conclusions, assessing the flow of the essay.

Prepare a draft. Transform your outline into the body of the essay. Keep the interest of your readers by identifying the relationship between your qualifications or experiences. Also, assess the overall flow of the essay. Popular transition

words include the following: However, nonetheless, similarly, furthermore, moreover, first/second/third, in addition to, meanwhile.

After you have finished the middle of the essay, move on to the introduction and conclusion. Waiting to do so ensures that you are effectively orientating your readers to your thesis. Effective writers often hook readers with a compelling story, moment of joy, relevant achievement or commentary related to their interest in the field. Avoid jokes. Keep it simple, concise, and intriguing.

Tailor the content to specific schools. Many programs use centralized application systems, such as medicine, dentistry, law, and pharmacy. Other programs provide specific prompts or supplemental questions. If you are submitting the application directly to a specific school, confirm that you listed its name correctly in the essay and identified concrete reasons for your interest in that particular institution over others. In regards to your research interests, do not be too detailed and instead convey a sense of openness, especially because faculty often enjoy molding their graduate students and you may not know which professors are unavailable due to sabbatical.

Address any blemishes in your application. Special situations that may impact a student's application include gaps in enrollment, changing of major, low grades, poor test scores, or criminal charges. Avoid excuses, but do include something. Otherwise, your readers may make assumptions that could be worse than reality. Instead, be brief and emphasize how you grew from the experience. Reframe it as evidence of your persistence and commitment to your goals. Depending on your field of study, it may also help you build rapport and convey empathy more powerfully with individuals who are also facing difficult circumstances.

Carefully read the instructions. Did you specifically address the questions they provided or share the information they desired? Pay attention to length and formatting requirements, as well as submission procedures.

Revise, revise, revise. Never fall in love with your first draft. Let it sit for a while and return to it with a fresh perspective. Read it aloud. Look carefully for run-ons, passive voice, fragments and redundant sentence structure. Confirm that you used strong action verbs and industry buzz words. Request feedback from at least three reviewers, such as your academic advisor, professors, Writing Center consultants, or Student Success Center staff. Avoid asking graduate school admissions counselors for feedback due to a conflict of interest.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Graduate and professional school interviews differ from job interviews because they are looking for candidates who not only have the skills to succeed in their programs, but also the ability to learn. All schools interview differently. Some meet with students individually, while others interview candidates as a panel, or with other candidates simultaneously. Ask questions during your admissions process and when you are invited to interview so you are not caught off guard by the format.

Listed below are some popular questions. Interviewers do not expect you to know every answer immediately. Take a few moments to consider your response and answer the questions concisely. Support each response with solid evidence. There is not typically a right answer, just a prepared, confident candidate speaking honestly.

For additional assistance, visit the Student Success Center to arrange an individual mock interview. During this appointment you will receive individual consultation that will help you refine your responses and maximize your performance during this crucial conversation.

CAREER GOALS & GENERAL BACKGROUND

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to pursue graduate school for _____?
- What impacted your decision to go to graduate school?
- Why did you select this program/school?

- Demonstrate your understanding of the profession by describing the work of your field in your own words.
- Why did you choose this profession over others? What have you done to investigate the field and confirm your decision?
- What will you like least about your profession? What are the negative aspects of this occupation?
- What do you hope to do with a graduate degree in this field? What are your future goals?
- What will you do if you fail to gain admission this year?

EDUCATION

- Tell me about your undergraduate experience at Augustana. How did it prepare you for grad school?
- What was your involvement like outside of the classroom?
- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team project. What was your role? What were the outcomes?
- How would your faculty describe you?
- What would you contribute to our program?

EXPERIENCE

- What related experience have you had? What did you learn from these experiences?
- Tell me about a particular experience which has helped you recognize your interests and strengths.
- Tell me about your research.
- Describe a pressing issue that professionals in your field are currently facing. In your opinion, what are the three most important problems in the field right now?
- Describe a time you demonstrated initiative.

PERSONAL

- What motivates you to do your best work?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges you will face in graduate school?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- What has been your biggest failure and how did you handle it? Tell me about a mistake you made and how you handled it.
- How do you handle stress or work under pressure? Give an example.
- How do you respond to criticism? Describe a time when you received negative feedback regarding your work. What was your reaction?
- How would others describe you?
- What is your favorite book?
- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What was your favorite class and why?

CONCLUSION

- Why should you be accepted into this program?
- What questions do you have for us?