

# WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

## TAKE TIME FOR SELF-EXPLORATION

Admissions committee members are looking for interesting, insightful, revealing, and non-generic essays that suggest you have successfully gone through a process of careful reflection and self-examination. By taking the time to explore your own interests, values, skills, and goals, you can best portray your reason for applying to graduate school in general, as well as specific programs, and how this next step in your academic journey will affect your professional life.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- What is special, unique, distinctive or impressive about you and your life story?
- When did you originally become interested in this field and what have you learned since?
- How have you learned about this field?
- What are your career goals?
- What personal characteristics do you possess that will make you successful?
- What are the compelling reasons you can give for the committee to be interested in you?

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

- Have you read through the mission statement of the program? What resonates with you?
- With which professors are you're interested in working? Does their research align with your interests?
- What are the major components that you wish to learn from this program?
- Why did you choose to apply to this program, over others?

## BE UNIQUE

Don't focus on writing what you think the admissions committee wants to hear. Incorporate personal components that make you the unique author of the statement. You may choose to include personal narratives, challenges, or other characteristics but also think more critically about how these situations/characteristics relay to the graduate program and your professional outcomes. A personal and analytical approach is key to success in this endeavor!

## TELL A STORY

Your transcripts, test scores, and CV/resume only present stats about you as candidate. In your personal statement, you need to develop a story that is interesting, one that pulls the stats together with your life experiences.

## CONTENT

- Be prepared to answer general prompts such as, "Share your personal, academic and professional background, intended field of study and your career plans" or a specific questions such as, "Describe a time you failed and what you learned?"
- Capture the reader's interest in your opening paragraph. Consider a narrative hook and revisit the theme throughout.
- Mention specific research projects and the professors with whom you worked.
- Link your interests with the research that is being done by professors at the target school. It's important to research the specific program and professors.
- Focus on your goals after you get your advanced degree.
- Explain why you are interested in each particular school and how you are a good fit. Be specific about why you are choosing to apply to this program over other similar ones.
- Develop an outline with topic sentences. Make transitions between paragraphs.

## TIPS

- Write clearly and concisely.
- Address the specific questions that are asked. If you are applying to multiple programs, take care to craft unique essays for the unique prompts.
- Avoid potential controversial subjects.
- Use active words and avoid passive voice.
- Don't repeat yourself, your resume or other parts of your application.
- Concentrate on creating strong opening and closing paragraphs.
- Put time and thought into it; start with an outline before you begin writing.

Adapted from Ohio University "Getting Started: Some Pointers For How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School" (Stelzer)

- Draft, re-draft, and draft again. Bring a copy to the Writing Center or CEO for review.
- Be sure you fix grammatical and spelling errors. Have others proofread.
- Use professional language.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN REVIEWING YOUR DRAFT:**

- Does your opening paragraph capture the reader's attention?
- Was the statement as a whole interesting?
- Was the statement well written, free of errors and typos?
- Did you answer the questions clearly and concisely?
- Did the statement reflect your interests and personality?
- Would the statement distinguish you from other applicants?
- Does your statement express your goals for the future?

#### **LIBRARY RESOURCES**

The Goucher College library hosts a range of materials that can assist in crafting your personal statement. For a list of titles visit [library.goucher.edu](http://library.goucher.edu) or ask a librarian.

**For other tips & questions contact the CEO at 410-337-6191 or  
visit the CEO website at [www.goucher.edu/CEO](http://www.goucher.edu/CEO)**

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