Personal Statements
OSU-Cascades Career Development Center

Personal statements are essays that are commonly written for graduate and professional school applications. Admissions committees are looking for interesting, insightful and unique stories, and use the essay to determine many factors including writing skills, motivation, program fit and clarity of goals. Thorough reflection on yourself, your experiences, skills, motivations, and goals is essential.

Where do I begin?

Start by reflecting on your past experience and skills as well as thinking ahead to your future career goals and how this program will help you accomplish them. Here are some questions to get you started on the process:

- Was there a specific situation that resulted in your interest in the industry? Describe.
- How has your interest evolved over time through your personal experiences (travel, jobs, volunteer), education (classes, teachers, projects, papers), and people you have met along the way?
- Have you received compliments or encouragement from other people to move forward in the field? Take note of these comments to consider adding to your essay.
- Why do you believe that this is the right field for you? What characteristics, traits or skills do you possess that will contribute to your success in the field?
- What is unique about your experience compared to your classmates or others? This could include information about your background, life experiences, and/or personality traits.
- Have there been any major challenges that you have had to overcome in your life that have contributed to your personal and/or professional development?
- What academic research or projects have you completed that you would want to highlight in your essay?
- Have you presented any of your work in a professional setting or had any work published?
- Are there skills or experiences you will acquire between now and when you will begin the graduate program (work, training, certification, research, internship) that are worth mentioning?
- Analyze your GPA to see if it would make sense to explain any gaps or low points in your transcripts.
- What do you plan to do with your degree after you graduate? Are there specific goals that you have set for yourself long-term?
- How might you contribute to the academic community of the field in the future?
- What aspects of each program really interest you in attending their school?
- If you can name specific faculty at your schools of interest, talk about their research and your interest in being involved.
- What do you like to do in your free time that the local community and surrounding area will provide?

The first paragraph is VERY important. You want it to be interesting and engage the reader to want to read further. Take notes on the questions above, then be creative to get the reader intrigued in your story right away.

How should it be formatted?

Some schools will give you specific questions to answer, in which case you should separate your responses by question. However, many programs will simply ask for a general personal statement which would be a comprehensive essay referencing the various topics above. Length of the personal statement can vary. You may be given a specific word limit which you want to follow. If not given a word limit, you do not want your essay to be any longer than two pages single spaced. Font should be size 11 or 12 and a simple font like Arial or Times New Roman.

Should I have it reviewed?

YES! You will go through many rough drafts of your personal statement. The more people you have read it the better. Ask professors and family members to review it. We can also read your essay in the Career Development Center to give you suggestions and feedback on the content that you include.

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