

Writing the Personal Statement

A personal statement allows you the opportunity to market yourself to a school.

There are two types: the general, comprehensive personal statement, and the response to very specific questions.

The General or Comprehensive Personal Statement

Overview of this type:

- Does not provide an assignment, prompt or question
- Allows you maximum freedom in terms of what you write

How do I approach such a broad question?

- Start by brainstorming about yourself. Here are some questions that you may want to consider asking yourself to generate ideas:
 - What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story?
 - What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in college? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
 - What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
 - Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
 - Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (ex: a discrepancy between grades and SAT scores or a significant change in grades between freshman and senior years)?
 - Why might you be a better candidate than other applicants?
- If applying to a specific program or major within a college, consider the following more specialized questions:
 - When did you become interested in this field and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
 - How have you learned about this field—through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
 - What are your career goals?
- Once you have brainstormed ideas, determine a focus for your essay and an approach to marketing yourself. (You do not just want to list all of your answers to the questions above. You need to approach this like you would any other essay, remembering that your purpose is to convince the admissions counselor, committee, or department that you are a great candidate for this institution.)

All information provided here is either taken directly from or modified based on the source below:

Doran, Jo and Allen Brizee. "Writing the Personal Statement." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. Purdue University, 8 May 2012. Web. 7 Sept. 2012. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>>

The Personal Statement in Response to Specific Question(s)

Overview of this type:

- Provides an assignment, prompt or question
- Expects a response specific to the question posed

What do I need to keep in mind when writing this type of statement/essay?

- Answer the question posed
 - Be sure to read the question carefully and develop a full understanding of what it is really asking.
 - Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all of your applications, even if the questions are similar. You may have overlap of ideas or even phrasing between your essays, but in every case, be sure your answer fits the question being asked. (Readers can tell if you are recycling something...and that is not impressive!)
- Tell a story
 - Make every effort to show or demonstrate your ideas through concrete experiences or examples. This makes your statement fresh, lively, and different, therefore, making you memorable.
- Be specific
 - Do not make a generalization about yourself without backing it up with specific reasons. Basically, prove any claims you make about yourself with concrete evidence.
 - This is especially true if you have the opportunity to show things you already know or experiences you have already had which would impress your reader.

Important Guidelines for Writing ANY Personal Statement

- Concentrate on your opening paragraph
 - Your first paragraph will either grab your reader's attention or lose it. Since the job of the admissions essay is to market yourself, you want to be sure to draw your reader into your world and your ideas.
- Avoid clichés
 - Stay away from commonly used expressions.
 - Schools want to see essays that demonstrate original thought.
- Write well and correctly
 - Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits.
 - Be meticulous about proofreading your essay.
 - Many admissions officers say that good written skills and command of correct use of language are very important to them as they read these statements. You do not want to make a bad impression just because you failed to proof your work.

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