

Personal Statement Preparation

GENERAL TIPS

- Personal statements help a committee get to know you beyond your test scores and transcript, and set you apart from the competition. This may be the only “interview” you have with a school so make it a true representation of your goals and who you are as a person.
- Showcase yourself through your voice, content, and clear, organized writing. Be concise, confident, and direct.
- Prepare by writing down your accomplishments, skills, personality traits, major influences, and goals. You can get more ideas from friends and family. If you choose to disclose sensitive information, be sure that you are comfortable with not knowing who or how many people will read your personal statement.
- It may benefit you to develop a theme based on your experiences and how it relates to your interest in the program and the institution you wish to attend.
- Proofread! Have multiple people review your statement (preferably at least one professor). Visit the CRC and the UF Writing Studio for individual help and workshops on creating a personal statement. It is common to rewrite a personal statement two or three times before deciding on a final draft.

COMMON QUESTIONS typically come in two categories:

1. Some schools will simply ask for a personal statement, letter of intent, or statement of purpose. This allows for maximum freedom in the subject of your statement.
2. Some schools will ask specific questions that you will need to address, sometimes asking multiple questions that need to be answered in different essays. Examples include:
 - Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
 - Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
 - Discuss how a degree from our school/program will help you in reaching your short and long term goals.

SCHOOL SPECIFICS

Law School: In law school, communication and critical thinking skills are a must, so admissions councils read your personal statement for evidence that you can both communicate effectively and formulate an argument. It will work in your favor if you capably describe why you wish to become a lawyer. Try to avoid statements like: “I have wanted to be a lawyer since...” and instead tell a story of the moment you knew you wanted to be a lawyer.

Graduate School (Research focused):

Typically you are asked to write a “Statement of Purpose” which is where you discuss your areas of research interest and your long-term plans. Speak to professors about legitimate research topics; have professors critique them for legitimacy and structure. These must be interesting and unique. Keep in mind that your research focus will probably change once you get into your program, but a solid research statement is necessary to be admitted.

Business School: The questions posed by business schools are intended to see if the applicant has potential as a leader, manager and team member. You may be asked to discuss a significant accomplishment that demonstrates your potential as a leader, or a situation in which you were part of a group working to solve a problem and tell us about your contribution to that goal.

Medical School: The American Medical Colleges Application Service (AMCAS) has very open-ended questions in its application, but schools usually require a supplemental application that asks specific questions about past activities. Do not merely state that you are good at science, or that you like to help people. These are not bad reasons for selecting the field of medicine, but strengthen your answer by giving stories or examples and discuss your reason for selecting the field of medicine.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

Who will read my personal statement?

Anywhere from one person to a committee of several people may read your statement.

How will my essay be evaluated?

It often serves to supplement the numbers that are part of your application; your content provides a more holistic view of who you are, while mechanics demonstrate writing ability.

Should I just play it safe and say what they want to hear?

Be yourself, not safely bland! Avoid excesses such as gimmicks; instead rely on self-reflection to get you reader interested in who you really are!

What do they want to hear?

What makes you different than the other applicants who are also basically qualified? Why are you a fit for our program's offerings?

Should I discuss that glaring blemish in my past, or ignore it?

If you can discuss it without complaining, making excuses, or fixating on it, yes. Show it as part of your larger success story and focus on your growth beyond that event.

Can I talk about personal things?

Yes, but be sure again not to fixate and miss the bigger question; reflect on how it ties in with your bigger career story. Also recognize your boundaries: you may have class with the people who read this!

How long should my personal statement be?

Look for an expectation or guide in the application materials. If none are given, two pages is typical. Take the space you need to fully answer the prompt without repeating yourself or losing focus.

DO

- Be personal. Speak in first person. This essay should reflect your voice.
- Be honest and be yourself instead of trying to be the ideal applicant.
- Research and address the program/school's **unique** features that attract you.
- Address the question that is being asked in the application (if applicable).
- Clarify your career goals.
- Highlight skills, abilities and passions that will make you a successful student and professional.
- Sharpen your opening and closing paragraph. This serves as a framework to the rest of your personal statement and will either grab the reader's attention or lose it.
- Maintain the theme that you introduced at the start of your personal statement. Remember to incorporate the theme in the closing paragraph of your statement.

DON'T

- Just tell your story, describe how it relates to your values, outlook and ambitions.
- Write a laundry list of your experiences. (That is the purpose of your resume.)
- Use a thesaurus. Sounding smart is not the same as being smart. Write in YOUR voice.
- Complain about circumstances in your life. Focus on how you overcame or were empowered by those circumstances.
- Use unconventional writing styles (i.e. referring to yourself in the third person, rhyming, or using jargon).
- Make unproven claims. Instead provide specific examples as evidence of a skill or trait.

OVERUSED OPENERS

1. From a young age/an early age/for as long as I can remember, I have always been interested in...
2. '____' is a profession I have always looked upon with...
3. '____' is a very challenging and demanding career ...'
4. 'For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with ..."